

Was Muhammad (PBUH) Merciful?

By Muhammad Hussam Uddin Al-Khateeb
Edited By IslamFuture

The Global Program for Introducing the Prophet of Mercy

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

*Bismi Allahi A**l**rrahmani A**l**rraheemi*

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

The Muslim World League
The Global Program for Introducing the Prophet of Mercy
Aspects of Mercy for Human Beings in the Character of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Awards

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Translated By Mujab Imam

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A Note on the Translation

Of all the damned dwellers of Dante's *Inferno*, a particularly unfortunate group comes in for a lot of stick. Its maimed members keep going forward, back and sideways at one and the same time thereby tearing themselves apart.

Bilingual people, I have often thought, are no less an unhappy lot. Condemned to lead a liminal life, ceaselessly shuttling between one *orde ordinum*/culture/language and another, we have often inflicted upon ourselves the same sado-masochist sufferings of Dante's damned.

Above all else perhaps we are pained and outraged that each culture is busy erecting its own segregation walls, impervious to all the revolutions underway in technology, information and telecommunication. Fortress Europe today is far more Eurocentric and xenophobic than it was fifty years ago. And the gloating, globalized, globalizing United States leaves the rest of the world speechless, increasingly looking back in anger at the happy days of American isolationism. At least we were spared the self-righteous rhetoric of ever burgeoning hordes of neolibs, neocons and crusading Zionized Christians. Indeed, with the level of western brutality to other cultures reaching an all-time high, many of us in Iraq, in Palestine, in Afghanistan, in Somalia, would like to be slaughtered in silence, thank you very much. We ache for the good old days when we were massacred with barely the crack of a knuckle- the civilized English way!

Faced with rampant Islamophobia and systematic Arab bashing, which have come to replace anti-Semitism in most western capitals, the Arab and Islamic world is also cultivating its own claustrophobia. Every now and then we let out the odd defensive backlash, born of a chronic siege mentality. Fiery speeches and sweeping mass demonstrations flash on world TV screens every time a certain nonentity says something somewhere against what we hold dear. The same ominously angry, hairy, sub-continental figures appear regularly, always screaming their heads off, always with fists

clenched and raised, always with a pile of books being incinerated nearby.

After a whole century of education, consciousness raising and supposedly breathless burning of stages, the East/West cultural dialogue, let us face it, is still in ground zero. Bilingual people are nowhere near bridging the gap or bringing the two parties any closer to each other.

"Of course *the West* is to blame in this," the argument often goes, and often rightly so, the west being the stronger, more privileged, more confident and perhaps the more liberal party. But we too have a large share of the blame. We have historically failed to see that "The West" is by no means the monolith of tattooed, flag-waving, gun-ho Marines and SAS men and women marauding the streets of Baghdad and Al-Basra. Nor are all western intellectuals the Bernard-Lewis type of neo-colonial apologists and appeasers. It is high time we realized that there is a huge public out there- by far the overwhelming majority- of decent, humane, enlightened and reasonably intelligent western people to whom we have been grossly unfair. We have failed to equip them with the vital database with which they can know more and, hopefully, counteract the simplistic and shameful cultural stereotypes.

The whole bulk of our Arab and Islamic cultural texts are still locked in moth-ridden libraries for "specialists" to use and abuse at will, while the decent reader remains starved of accessible and adequately processed information. Treasures of *Jahilite,* Umawi, Abbasside and modern Arab and Islamic contributions to human thought and human civilization are still mediated either by orientalists who often deliberately misunderstand them, or else by sub-continental translators who do not understand them at all.

The bit we did translate we translated terribly badly. Perhaps only truly bilingual people know how utterly flat and uninspiring does our Holy 'Quran sound in English. I can still remember the sheer embarrassment of having to explain to my ex-British/Irish wife that the primary source of our faith and our culture has almost nothing to do with the mediocre paperback translations she had poured over for months on end- not in the full meaning conveyed,

not in the minimum target-culture bias and dynamic equivalence needed in modern translations, and certainly not in capturing any of that awesome aesthetic beauty and splendour native speakers of Arabic feel and enjoy when reading Al-'Quran.

Nor could I furnish an alternative translation myself. After ten years of serious work (albeit intermittent, in hours snatched with difficulty from other pressing occupations), I am still unhappy with my own rendering into English of only one *Surah* of the Holy 'Quran. I had hoped to translate *Surat Al-Ra'hman* in a way that would attempt to capture at least some of the original beauty, especially that sublime sense of music, cadence and rhythm still ringing in my ears as my mother used to intone it after every morning prayer.

Somehow the traumatic experience made me amply aware of two translatological clichés- Le Fevre's all cultural misunderstandings have their translational roots, and E. Nida's everything is translatable, provided form is not an integral part of the content. Still, I do not in any way regret the attempt. Although I have- so far- failed, translating the venerable Quran into English must always be approached with a trembling hand and with the thorough mindedness that ponders the widest cultural implications of every sentence and every word. Translating the content/meaning alone is never enough. That is why, I have painfully come to realize, rendering the Holy Quran into decent modern English is beyond anyone's individual effort. We have only to remember that four hundred of Britain's brightest linguists, rhetoricians, theologians, philosophers, men of letters, scholars of all branches of science and disciplines of knowledge, as well as gifted translators, had laboured for over forty years to produce the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611).

In all honesty, I can see no reason why a similar large-scale cultural attempt cannot be mounted. Nothing is as urgent as translating Al-'Quran, content as well as form, into modern English; nothing as potent a conceptual tool to dispel cultural misunderstandings and to enlighten the willing.

The same goes for our Venerable Hadeeth, equally badly translated. *Sahih Al-Bukhari* is practically unreadable in English, and *Sahih Muslim* is only slightly better. In fact, when I first found the simple Arabic phrase ("rifkan bil-q'wareer") rendered by the sub-continental translator of the latter book as "be gentle with the vessels", I just gave up. I thought it might be better not to read anything at all than read the unreadable.

I simply could not lay my hands on some decent translations of our primary cultural sources that would enable "the other" to come to a better understanding of "us", decent though this western other was, reasonably enlightened, open-minded, sympathetic to other cultures, critical of her own, even a wishy-washy sixty-ish liberal with strong revisionist orientations. The stuff I found was still riddled with the "thrice" and "thee" and "thou" and "beautiful preaching" of pedantic scholars and scholastic minds, and those- I thought, and still do- cannot really address the modern sensibilities of the average intelligent reader.

Much as I loathe trendy metaphors originating in culture clashes and civilizational warfare, I believe the location of our present cultural challenge lies precisely here. Unless we win the hearts and minds of this intelligent world reading public, the western segment included, we shall always fail to challenge and change the cultural stereotypes stuck to each party. For our part, we must never tire trying to reach out to this specific segment, provide it with the primary data of our faith and our culture in the English language and the modern sensibility it understands. We should then leave it up to its members to think and judge for themselves and draw their own conclusions. The puerile missionary campaigns launched in the last decade or two have often been counterproductive. As participants in the Inter-Faith Conference held recently in Spain have repeatedly indicated, a more "constructive dialogue" is needed- a more rational and genuinely multicultural debate, initiated and maintained as much to inform and enlighten the cultural "other" as to develop a less monolithic, less morally monist cultural "self".

It is admittedly a difficult balancing act and a complex course of action. Yet, not least because the present alternative is simply unacceptable, it is a course of action well worth taking. The cultural

gap with its deep-seated translatological roots is widening by the hour. On both public and private levels, it is yielding a manifestly mutilated, polarized, culturally schizophrenic, binary-opposite world. I am hardly surprised that many western friends and colleagues have become either members of extreme right movements now or, alas, like my ex-wife, born-again Christians.

For such public and private reasons, I have accepted the commission to translate three award-winning volumes in the present Programme for Introducing the Prophet of Mercy. The first volume, *Was Muhammad (PBUH) Merciful*, unravels many of the humane aspects of Islam western readers should know and register. Equally important, the book documents its argument with the broadest cross-cultural reference to the primary sources of our faith and our civilization, the Holy Quran and the Venerable Hadeeth. I hope I have managed to render the cited material into the modern English and the modern sensibility of our present world, with all the faithfulness due to the original. Further, the book is thoroughly conscious of the cultural other in the small village the world has become. Although the character of the Christian priest, Father Stephano, can be developed further, by giving it more guts and intellectual clout, and by making it less of the Glaucon stooge-of-the-plot it presently is, the overall work could well provide the basis for a productive cultural dialogue. The larger space the book accords to refuting the charges of the sword and of demeaning women is no less apt and necessary.

Seen together the three volumes, I hope, would ultimately drill a tiny hole in the windy and winding segregation walls, the time not being right yet for larger demotion cranes.

Mujab Imam

Al-Riyadh Women University

In the Name of God the Compassionate and Most Merciful

Whose Guidance and Help I Ever Seek and Invoke

Preface

I have turned the bulk of this study into an answer to the central question posed in its title: *Was Muhammad (pbuh) Merciful?*

The study itself falls into four parts:

- Chapter One: An Introduction
- Chapter Two: Aspects of Mercy for Human Beings in the Character of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Before the Divine Call
- Chapter Three: Introducing the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
- Chapter Four: Aspects of Mercy for Human Beings in the Character of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) After the Divine Call

The reader will no doubt note that the first three chapters are only a prologue to the fourth, which carries the weight of the argument and is the main part and chief objective of this study. Each of the four chapters is in turn divided into various subsections, each with a specific idea tackled and underpinned by a corresponding subtitle. A brief conclusion rounds up the debate, followed by a bibliographical list of reference works cited.

I have deliberately avoided direct exposition and opted instead for a more dialogical and discursive methodology. The latter, I believe, is much more catchy and appealing, particularly to the lay western reader who is more at ease with the less formal, less demanding narrative technique. Further, as characters are the necessary upholders of dialogue, I have envisioned two fictional characters (Father Nicholas and Father Stephano), who function largely as fictive registers. They offer the reader a spacio-temporal

framework geared as much to foreground the ideas discussed as to help bring the debate closer to the real world.

The reader will also note that Father Stephano is by no means the typically aggressive, investigative, journalistically-minded ignoramus. He is rather an enlightened, sympathetic and fair-minded person. His primary concern is to know the truth and acknowledge it, detect and shun the false and the fraudulent. It is a fairly common character in the enlightened western circles whose objective and genuinely liberal opinions are rarely aired in the media. The western media in fact strives to marginalize such views, if not suppress them altogether.

No wonder Father Stephano is so eager to learn about the original texts and primary sources of Islam. He had to know for sure before he would take any decisive step in this regard. Although he is not categorical about what he intends to do, Father Stephano is nevertheless quite allusive,(1) as I have indicated early on in the study.(2)

Ultimately, if I prove right in my present undertaking, it is thanks to the Lord Almighty who granted me help and assistance; if wrong, I have only my erring self to blame. I humbly beg His forgiveness and- as always, in any event and at all times- all grace and gratitude, all thanks and praise, are unto Him.

Muhammad Hussam Al-Khateeb

Damascus, 17. 01. 1428 H.,AD 04. 01. 2007

(1) See the end of the meeting in the final section of this study (The Conclusion).
(2) See below pp. 8 & 21.

Chapter One

Introduction

A Christian clergyman called Father Nicholas has been living next to me for a good few years now. When he first moved in I hastened to welcome him. I offered the initial helping hand necessary for him to sort things out and settle in nicely in his new flat. It was only a small gesture of friendship and camaraderie, perfectly in line with my commitment to my Islamic teachings, which make it imperative for all Muslims to maintain good neighbourly relations, regardless of the race, colour or creed of their neighbours. After all, it was the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) himself who said: "Gabriel kept urging me to be kind to my neighbours till I thought he would give them the right of inheritance."(1)

Months and years passed and Father Nicholas and I somehow seemed to have developed a kind of intimacy founded on a venerable 'Quranic verse: "Indeed… you will find that the closest and most loving to the believers (Muslims) are those who say 'We are Christians.'"(2) We exchanged visits regularly on special Muslim and Christian feasts and festivities, often spending the time talking about our two religions. We stayed clear of the usual chatter and flattering, small talk. He told me about his faith as he understood and practiced it and I told him about mine, often to the mutual benefit of both.

Things went on like this till 12/ 09/ 2006, I still remember the exact date, when the newly appointed Pope of the Vatican, Benedictus XVI, made his well-known remarks which offended Muslims and insulted the Islamic Prophet. The new Pontiff quoted at length some moronic medieval texts, written at a time when religious wars were still raging between Christians and Muslims, partly due to such claims that "Islam was spread by the

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 5568-5569; Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 356.
(2) Al-Ma'idah: 82.

sword" and that "the Prophet of Islam brought nothing new but the sword." The same hackneyed charges really, propagated by the same people and the same mentality that engendered crusades and crusaders in the first place. It is the same frame of mind still intent on raking old fires and fomenting further religious wars and culture clashes.[1]

The media hype began in earnest immediately after, reporting the Pope's provocative remarks and the various reactions to them.

I bumped into my neighbour Father Nicholas a couple of days later, on 20/09/2006 to be specific, right at the front door of our building. As usual, we said hello, shook hands, inquired about each other's health and how things are going. Only this time he added:

-When does your month of fasting begin this year?

-In three or four days, I said, depending on when exactly the crescent moon of Ramadan becomes visible.

-I'll come and visit you on the first day of Ramadan to congratulate you on the start of your fasting feast.

- Most welcome.

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[1] The English Zionist orientalist Bernard Lewis says: "To the European observer in particular, one noteworthy aspect of the Islamic society was its tolerance compared to other societies at the time. For, contrary to their western contemporaries, rarely did the medieval Muslim rulers feel the need to impose their faith by force on all their subjects." (B. Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, Oxford: OUP, 2001, translated into Arabic by N. Fares, Beirut: Dar Al-'Ilm Lil-Malayeen, 1945, p. 45.)

Similarly, in his *Islam at a Crossroad*, the orientalist De Lacy O'Leary says: "History makes it clear… that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated." (London: 1923, p. 8.)

In her *History of the Islamic Legislature*, the Polish orientalist Bourghinia Jianah also says: "Both history and commonsense give lie to the claim that Islam spread by the sword." (B. Jiannah, *The History of Islamic Legislature*, translated into Arabic as *Tareekh Al-Tashree' Al-Islami*, Beirut: Dar Al-Afa'ak Al-Jadeedah, 1980, p. 17.)

From a different perspective, the orientalist Thomas Carlyle points rather to Christians using the sword to spread Christianity. In his *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle says: "Charlemagne's conversion of the Saxons was not by preaching." (Gutenberg Project Online, 17. 04. 2008, p. 296.)

-What do you usually do in a typical Ramadan evening, he asked? I wouldn't like to come at an inconvenient time.

-Well, I usually wait for the *Mu'azen* to call for the *Maghreb* prayer thereby announcing the end of fasting for that day. I have a couple of dates or a drink of water, pray the *Maghreb* then have my main meal. After that I pray the *Isha* and the *Taraweh* in the mosque, where I perform all my prayers. At around nine p.m., winter timing, I stay in to have some rest.

-We'll meet at nine, then, the first day of Ramadan, if that's ok with you, he said.

-God willing.

-Oh, and I'll bring a friend along, if you don't mind, he added. You don't know him. He'd like to meet you and speak with you.

-Most welcome, you and your friend.

We said goodbye to one another. I pushed on to where I was heading and he climbed up the steps to his flat.

1. Refuting the Charge of the Sword

The first day of Ramadan, 1427H., nine o'clock sharp, the doorbell rang. I received and warmly welcomed the two guests. Father Nicholas introduced his companion:

-My friend, Father Stephano, from the cultural section of the Italian Embassy here.

I welcomed the guest again and we started talking about this and that. I played host to both of them and fulfilled my obligations as best as I could, according to our Islamic teachings and in line with what the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Whoever believed in God and the Day of Judgment let him honour and be generous to his guest."(1) Father Stephano took the initiative, asking me in an Arabic tinged with a foreign accent:

-I have a question to put to you and I hope you'd have the answer.

-Sure, I said. I'd love to oblige if I could. Perhaps it is to do with what the Pope said lately, isn't it, I asked?

-Oh, no, never mind that, Father Stephano said smiling. Every now and then somebody somewhere throws about these firecrackers, often goaded by some big wig politicians. They serve their hidden agendas and conspiratorial plans. Mind you, he added, the animated and misguided person often retracts what he said when he realizes what he's really got himself into and how inflammatory are such remarks.

-Still, seen as you've brought it up, how do you see what the Pope said? Is the charge that Islam spread by the sword true or false?(2)

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 47.

(2) For a refutation of the charge that Islam spread by the sword, see Rene Jinoux's *The Symbolism of the Crucifix*.

-And how would I know, I asked?

-Surely, judging by the primary sources and the original texts from which you Muslims derive the bulk of your religious teachings, he said.

-And where would I find these texts, I asked?

-Oh everyone knows that your primary sources and original texts are the verses of the 'Quran, your Holy Book, the veritable Hadeeths your Prophet said, and the true accounts of the life story or *sirah* of the Prophet.(1)

-But would you accept the authority and referentiality of these texts?

-And why not, he asked? We wouldn't know the truth about any religion, creed or philosophy except with reference to its own texts and as approved by its own people and advocates. At least thus spake reason.(2)

-Fair enough. Well, in that case, I'll give you the texts whose authority you've accepted, and I'll leave it up to your good sense and fair mindedness to judge.

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(1) Biography is the nearest English equivalent to *sirah*, though the Arabic term includes all the sayings and patterns of conduct of the Prophet and His Companions, with all that is related to them. In what follows I would rather use the Arabic term with its broader associations. (Trans.)

There are two worthy attempts to authenticate accounts of the Prophet's *sirah* published recently. One was made by the late revivalist, Sheikh Naser Al-Deen Al-Albani (God rest his soul), entitled *Sahih Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*; the other by Dr Akram Al-Umari, entitled *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah Al-Sahihah*. Other attempts can be added here, including Muhammad Al-Suyani's *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah Kama Waradat fi Al-Ahadeeth Al-Sahihah*.

(2) The Swiss orientalist Jean Shapiro says: "The more one knows about the life of the Prophet Muhammad- not as told by his malicious adversaries who seek to insult him but rather as reported by his contemporaries and as derived from the Quran and the *Sunnah*- the more one realizes the reasons why millions of people down the ages have admired this man and have so piously dedicated themselves to loving and venerating him." Quoted in M. F Abdulwahab, *Muhammad fis Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, Tunisia: Dar Bu Salamah, 1985, p. 30.

-I'm all ears.

-Listen to the following verse of the venerable 'Quran, teaching the Prophet of Islam himself, and through him all Muslims, the right way to go about spreading the Islamic faith. The verse directly addresses the Godsend Messenger (pbuh) and all Muslims, saying: "Invite (mankind) to the Way of your Lord through wisdom and sound preaching."[(1)] Now do you see in this a call to use the sword or to resort to reason, debate and dialogue?

-Debate rather, he said, and a spirited and good-tempered debate for that.

-Another 'Quranic verse also addresses the Godsend Messenger (pbuh) and all Muslims directly, saying: "Argue with them in the best and most gracious ways."[(2)] Do you find any swords drawn here or just a call for reasoning and debate?

-Reasoning and debate, he said, and like the previous one, spirited and good-tempered.

-A third 'Quranic verse says: "Argue not with the People of the Scripture(s) save in the better way."[(3)] And the people of the Scriptures, as you know, are the Jews and the Christians. A sword is it or a rational debate?

-Only debate, and, like the previous two, lively and good-tempered.

But, he hastened to add, would you explain to me, with reference to the original texts, how this debate is conducted "in the better way"?

-Yes, without veering an inch from the original texts. Listen to the rest of the 'Quranic verse and it'll make the point abundantly clearly. The Lord says: "Argue not with the people of the Scripture(s) save in the better way, with the exception of those

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(1) Al-Nahl, 125.
(2) Al-Nahl, 125.
(3) Al-Ankabout, 46.

amongst them who are unfair and oppressive. And to those do say: 'We believe in what is revealed to us, and we believe in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are_one and the same, and to Him we remain (Faithful) Muslims.'"[(1)] We, Muslims that is, have to explain to Jews and Christians the truth about our religion- first, that it acknowledges all former prophets, Godsend to enlighten and guide human beings and, second, that it acknowledges all divine books, including the Old and the New Testaments, revealed unto Moses and Jesus (pbut).

-Fine, Father Stephano said, but I'd like you to tell me more about a specific phrase mentioned in the 'Quranic verse.

-Which?

-"With the exception of those amongst them who are unfair and oppressive". Who are those people exempt from the goodly and kind way of debate and dialogue?

-The ones who curse Islam, swear at its Prophet and attack and repress Muslims. Would the better way of rational debate be of any use with the likes of them?

-I suppose not, he said, transgressors must be held to account. Reason tells us if we let the aggressors get away with their offence, they'd inflict even more harm on the innocent.

-I must say, though, he added, the gesture in the 'Quranic verse does preserve the dignity of Muslims.[(2)]

[(1)] Al-Ankabout, 46.

[(2)] In her book *Muhammad*, the British theological scholar Karen Armstrong says: "We often imagine Muhammad in the West as a military leader wielding his sword to impose Islam on reluctant societies. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Muhammad and the Muslim pioneering forefathers were only struggling to stay alive." (New York: Harper Collins, 1993. Translated into Arabic by F. Nasr & M. 'Anani, Cairo: Kitab fi Su'tur, 1998, p. 252.) "After the Hijrah, the 'Quran started to lay down and develop specific legislations for the just war. For war is indeed necessary sometimes to maintain moral values," Ms Armstrong adds. "Had it not been for some religious people who defended themselves and stood up to aggression, all their places of worship would have been desecrated and destroyed." (Ibid., P. 254.) "Many Christians today approve of the concept of the just war," she goes on to say, "because they know that taking up arms against the likes of Hitler and Sese Siko is the only effective way.

-Fair is fair. Thank you, I said.

-I agree, then, according to these texts, that the Islamic Faith calls for dialogue and debate, but…

Father Stephano kept silent for a while.

-But what, I said, spurring him on.

-But if the ones you are arguing with would not listen to or accept your calling, if debate is well and truly pointless, what then? The sword, isn't it?

-Hold on, I said. Let's not jump to conclusions. We are still agreed to defer to the primary sources and original texts, I take it?

-Sure, and I shall not absolve you of your promise to stick to them.

-Listen then to this 'Quranic verse, which instructs the Prophet of Islam and every Muslim as to how to conduct the debate with Christians and Jews, and how to reply to the rejectionists among them. The verse says: "People of the Scripture, let us come to a fair deal that you and us worship none but God, that we ascribe no partners unto Him, that we take not each other as lords and masters besides God. If they refuse and turn away, then say to them: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims and we take the Islamic way.'"[1]

If Christians and Jews reject what you ask them to do, i.e. believe in the oneness of God and in the worship of the Almighty Lord, then leave them alone and remain staunch believers in Islam yourselves.[2] I reiterated: "If they refuse and turn away,

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That is why Islam does not passively turn the other cheek but actively fights tyranny and oppression." (Ibid., P. 259.)

(1) 'Al-'Imran, 64.

(2) In the same book, *Muhammad*, Karen Armstrong notes: "Like Christians, the Jews enjoyed complete religious freedom in the Islamic Empire. They lived peacefully in the region till the establishment of the state of Israel in our present century (the twentieth century). They never suffered under Islam what they had suffered under Christianity. As for the European anti-Semitic myths, they were brought to the Middle East towards the end of the nineteenth century at the hands of Christian missionaries,

then say to them: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims and we take the Islamic way." Now is there any sword, violence or coercion in this?

-Truth is, Father Stephano said, no swords, violence or coercion used or called for.

-Even clearer and more explicit is the 'Quranic verse that says, referring to all human beings of every sect and creed: "The Truth comes down from your Lord- whoever wishes to believe, let him believe; whoever wishes to disbelieve, let him disbelieve."[1]

Once again I reiterated: "Whoever wishes to believe, let him believe; whoever wishes to disbelieve, let him disbelieve." Holding believers and disbelievers to account is thus God's business, not any human being's.

More categorical still is the 'Quranic verse stating the generic principle of preaching Islam and of all missionary Islamic work: "No coercion in religion: Right stands clear and distinct from wrong."[2] Do you know, in accordance with this basic principle, what the Muslim Prophet did when infidel pagans and polytheists had rejected his call, refused to accept the oneness of God and insisted on their intractable and perverse ways of worship?

-What?

-He brandished no swords, scolded no one, used no means to coerce anyone. He only took refuge in his Lord, praying to Him and asking His guidance in what to do with those headstrong disbelievers. The 'Quranic verse came down to him from the Lord Almighty later on, instructing him and his followers to "Say: You disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, and you do not worship what I do. Nor shall I worship what you worship, or

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and were usually treated with contempt by the local people." (K. Armstrong, *Muhammad,* cit., pp. 309-310.)

[1] Al-Kahf, 29.

[2] Al-Bak'arah, 256.

shall you worship what I do. You have your own faith, I have mine."[1]

"You have your own faith, I have mine," I reiterated.

The Divine Revelation also instructed the Prophet that "If they belie you, say: 'I have my own ways and my own deeds; you have your own. You are innocent of what I do, and I am innocent of what you do.'"[2]

It further tells him to "Say: 'God alone I worship. To Him alone is my whole Faith and devotion. You worship what you will beside Him.'"[3]

Is there more religious tolerance than this, I added?

-The epitome of fairness and justice, I must say, Father Stephano declared. I personally testify to that.

-Do you know now, judging by the original texts, whether the charge of spreading Islam by the sword is true or false?

-Sure, I do, he said. It is decidedly false. Islam is wholly innocent of it.[4]

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(1) Al-Kafirun, 1-5.

(2) Yunis, 41.

(3) Al-Zumar, 14-15.

(4) Mahatma Ghandi said in relation to this charge: "I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind… I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. When I closed the second volume of the Prophet's biography, I was sorry there was no more for me to read of that great life." (*Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., p. 39.)

The orientalist Thomas Carlyle says in his *Mahomet the Ideal*: "Much has been said about Mahomet propagating the Islamic religion by the sword. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Indeed the ones who make such claims should reflect for a while, for there must be a secret in that sword which in the hands of Muslim leaders went out of Arabia and reached the mountains of Spain in the west and Samarkand in the east. What is that secret? Doubtlessly it is the divine creed that the prophet Mahomet brought along with him, that mighty power that drove the idolaters of Arabia to submit and yield to this religion with its divine codes, laid forth by the Omniscient

2. Western Scholars and the Study of Muhammad's Character (pbuh)

I'd like to return now, if I may, to the question I came here for, Father Stephano said.

And what was that?

My country sent me over as a clergyman to your country not to spend my time in preaching. Goodness knows you have more than enough Muslim and Christian preachers already.

You're right, I said. So what were you sent for?

I was engaged by the people I work for to study the "aspects of mercy for human beings in the character of Muhammad." Through these aspects I am supposed to see the real character of this prophet: was it such a harsh and callous character that would justify the charge of coming to power and of spreading his faith by the sword, or was it a compassionate, merciful and humane character that would ipso facto invalidate such accusations?

And what called for such a study in the first place, I asked?

Well, our western societies have become obsessed with almost everything related to Islam and to the life of your prophet, largely due to what's being put across in the media these days. The people concerned found no better way than conduct their own research, trying to reassess the life of Muhammad in the light of the original texts he brought with him. The aim is to arrive at the honest, objective truth about Muhammad and his religion, then put through the facts and findings of this study to

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and Wise Lord to safeguard the happiness and progress of mankind. The other issue we need to draw attention to here is that, when Islam spread east and west, it had already swept all false doctrines and creeds in its victorious path. This is because Islam was the enduring truth emanating from the very essence of man, whereas other creeds and doctrines were either false or contradictory to Human Nature and hence transient or fleeting." (*On Heroes and Hero Worship*, cit., 269.)

NB. Despite Carlyle's defense of Islam and the Islamic Prophet, he made many controversial remarks about the Venerable 'Quran which do not agree with the Islamic faith.

western societies so as to help them rid themselves of any misconceptions.

When I decided to begin work, he added, I found that I had to read what western scholars and orientalists had written about the character of Muhammad. It took me about a year and it yielded the following conclusion:

Western scholars who studied the character of Muhammad can be divided into two groups:

-The first group wrote about him from a wholly negative perspective. Their starting point was the classical hostile view propagated and adopted by the western church long time ago. This view pointedly posited a mutilated picture, geared to put westerners off Muhammad and his religion so that Christians would neither be attracted to him nor converted to his religion.

Amongst this group of perverse mutilators were ancient and modern scholars.

It was the French philosopher Renan who lifted the lid on the ancient mutilators. He exposed them to the public so that no one would ever again be deceived by what they said. He bore witness to their overt bias against Islam and their open hatred to Muhammad (pbuh). He said: "Christians have written a weird history of Muhammad… filled with malicious hatred. They claimed that Muhammad used to prostrate himself in worship before a golden statue the devils had kept hidden for him! In his *Inferno*, Dante labeled him the atheist infidel par excellence. To him, and to many others, the name Muhammad became synonymous with apostate and infidel!

In the eyes of medieval writers, Muhammad was sometimes a sorcerer, other times a terrible dissolute and debauch, a camel-stealing thief, even a Christian cardinal who failed to become Pope and so concocted a new religion he called Islam to avenge himself and vent his anger at his adversaries! The story of

Muhammad became the epitome of all abominations and sins, the stuff and matter of all horror tall tales."[1]

Renan's views become clearer, Father Stephano added, when set against what the Swiss orientalist John Vanport wrote in his *Muhammad and the 'Quran*: "The clearer the picture we get of Muhammad's real character, as seen through the judicious and insightful eyes of genuine historical sources, the weaker the proof and flimsier the evidence furnished in support of all the harsh criticism and ugly slander leveled at him by prejudiced and biased writers. Those writers have systematically failed to see the truth about Muhammad and about his status in the world."

They become clearer still when we also read what George Bernard Shaw wrote in his book *Muhammad*, which incidentally was burnt by the British authorities. He said: "Because of their ignorance and prejudice, medieval Christian theologians and clergymen drew a really dark picture of Muhammad's religion."

-In his book *Islam at a Crossroad*, Father Stephano went on, the Austrian orientalist Leopold Weiss[2] tells us about the other lot in this group- the modern mutilators. Those claim to have studied Muhammad's character according to the latest scientific and objective critical methodology, which demands that the scholar set aside all personal prejudices and partisan views before he embarks on his study. Weiss says: "The inductive/deductive approach adopted by most orientalists (who studied Islam and the Prophet's *sirah*) brings to mind the medieval Inquisitions, instituted by the Catholic Church to settle accounts with its adversaries. This so-called scientific methodology never really managed to look objectively at the available historical evidence. In almost every case, the starting point was a preconceived idea

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(1) E. Renan, *etudes d'histoire religiouse*, quoted in Abdull Rahman Badawi's *A Defense of Muhammad*, translated into Arabic as *Difa' 'an Muhammad* by K. Jadullah, Cairo: Al-Dar Al-'Alamiah Lilkutub, 1999, pp. 5-6.

(2) After he studied Islam and came to know its essence and the truth about it, the orientalist Leopold Weiss converted to Islam and called himself Muhammad Assad.

and a foregone conclusion, dictated by its author's partisan ideological bias."(1)

"Orientalists' prejudice against Islam," Weiss continues in the same book, "is an inherited drive and a natural urge. It is the product of the crusades and the impact they had left behind, with all their associations and implications to the European mind."(2)

The French orientalist Etienne Dinet, Father Stephano added, also talked about those modern mutilators in his book *Muhammad the Prophet of God*. He showed the lower depths to which some orientalists had sunk in their accounts of the Prophet's life. "It is difficult," Dinet said, "often practically impossible for orientalists to set aside their personal feelings and the different influences of their environment and their various persuasions. That is why their distortions of the Prophet's biography have reached such a ludicrous extent that one well and truly fears for the real picture. For all their claims to have used innocent critical tools, to have applied the laws and standards of serious and objective research, we always find that Muhammad in their writings speaks with a distinct German accent when the orientalist is German or with a distinct Italian accent if the orientalist is Italian. Indeed the picture we derive of Muhammad is so different with each telling and each author that if we sift through their varying biographical images and accounts, we find no traces of the real Arab and Islamic Muhammad.

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(1) In his book *la vie de Mahomet*, the French orientalist Emile Dermenghem talks about the negative role some orientalists played in writing the Prophet's *sirahs*. He said: "It is truly unfortunate that some specialists- including Muir, Margoliouth, Noldeke, Sprenger, Dozy, Caetani, Marsin, Grimm, Goldziher, Gaudefroy and others- have gone to extremes in their criticism sometimes. Their books still have a destructive impact, and the conclusions they reached are still negative and incomplete. No objective biography can be based on negation and dismissal… (or) on a series of self-contradictory arguments. Equally unfortunate however is that Father Lamnes, one of the best modern orientalists, was the most biased and prejudiced! His otherwise marvelous and precise accounts have been marred by his hatred of Islam and its prophet." (E. Demenghem, *La Vie de Mahomet*, translated into Arabic by A. Zu'aiter, Beirut: Dar Al-'Iilm Lilmalayeen, nd., pp. 8-11.)

(2) Leopold Weiss, *Islam at a Crossroads*, translated into Arabic by A. Zu'aiter, Beirut: Dar Ih'ia' Al-Kutub Al-Arabiah, 1956, p. 58.

"Orietalists have offered us such fanciful images that cannot be farther from the truth- so farther from the truth and more fanciful in fact than all the dramatis personae of the historical novels of Walter Scot or Alexander Dumas. At least those historical novelists were depicting persons from their own people and their own cultural milieu, and had to worry therefore only about the different timing and chronological order. Orientalists on the other hand could not even envisage the cultural milieu of the Prophet, the subject of their biographies, so they simply depicted him from the standpoint of their own western logic and modern imagination.

"What would the Europeans think," Dinet asks, "if some Eastern scholar, say in the far ends of China, had studied the numerous contradictory accounts of Cardinal Richelieu common to French historians, then subjected these accounts to the logic of his distant eastern revisionism, dismantled the story of Cardinal Richelieu as we know it, and reconstructed for us a totally different Richelieu with the distinct mentality, nature and characteristics of a Beijing priest?!

"Orientalists of the modern world have followed the same methodology, and they necessarily reached similar conclusions in relation to Muhammad's biography. We often imagine that the Muhammad of their writings speaks German, English or French. With the mentality and attributes they have ascribed to him, we can never envisage the Arab and Muslim Prophet Muhammad talking in Arabic to Arabs and Muslims."(1)

-The Orientalist Montgomery Watt, Father Stephano went on, talked about those modern mutilators, too. "If it happens that the views of some western scholars are unacceptable to Muslims," he said in his book *Muhammad at Mecca*, "it is because those scholars have not been always true to the objective premises of their

(1) Etienne Dinet, *Muhammad the Messenger of God*, translated into Arabic by Abdulhaleem Mahmud, Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1979, pp. 27-28, 43-44. After he studied Islam and came to know its essence and the truth about it, the orientalist Dinet converted to Islam and called himself Nasser Al-Deen Al-Jazai'ri.

scholarship. That is why their views must be rethought from the standpoint of historical accuracy."[1]

Maxim Rodinson said as much in assessing the overall value of what modern western scholars have written about Islam and the Muslim Prophet: "It can be safely said that western scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have on the whole been more harmful than beneficial, precisely because they were influenced by hearsay and commonsensical views, not by the objective dictates of historical evidence."[2]

Having read what this group of ancient and modern mutilators had written, I myself have come to the conclusion that they were ignorant of Muhammad and of his true *sirah*, Father Stephano added. They didn't even bother to go back to the primary sources and original texts of Muhammad's life.[3]

It can be said therefore that the studies of these orientalists and scholars of Muhammad's *sirah* had been marred by a great deal of arbitrariness in explaining the texts and the events of his life, either because of their religious bias and racist prejudice, or because of their gross misunderstanding of Islam and its basic rules, regulations and real intentions.[4]

For all these reasons, Father Stephano concluded, the findings of this mutilating group of scholars, ancient and modern alike, have not been of much use to me in writing my research.

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(1) Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at M*ecca (London: 1952), translated into Arabic by Sha'ban Barakat, Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-A'sriah, nd., p. 6.

(2) Quoted in Joseph Schacht et al., *The Islamic Heritage,* translated into Arabic as *Turath Al-Islam*, Kuwait: *A'lam Al-Ma'rifah*: 8, p. 63.

(3) Dr Abdul Rahman Badawi writes in his *A Defense of Muhammad*: "In tracing the conceptions Europeans have held of the Prophet of Islam, I was shocked by their sheer ignorance, their flagrant aggression, their inherently preconceived ideas and ready-made verdicts, their oppressive prejudice against their adversaries. This does not apply only to their naïve and ignorant common people but also to their best scientists, philosophers, theologians, thinkers and historians." (Cit., p. 29.)

(4) See Dr Akram Al-Umari, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah Al-Sahihah*, cit., p. 18.

What about the other group, I asked?

The other group wrote about Muhammad's character from a diametrically opposite, often wholly positive, perspective. The starting point for its members was a cordial, sympathetic and fair minded attitude, seeking the truth and nothing but the truth.(1)

I tried to make use of their findings but, having read them thoroughly, I came to the conclusion that I cannot really content myself with the larger part of their collective oeuvre, despite the vivid picture of Muhammad they had painted in their writings.

But why?

Because I found that some scholars in this group studied Muhammad the genius, by studying aspects of human ingenuity then comparing Muhammad to other geniuses in human history; some others studied Muhammad the philosopher, by studying the principles of human philosophy then comparing Muhammad to great philosophers in human history; others studied Muhammad the religious reformer, by studying the ways and means of the religious reformation then comparing Muhammad to other great reformers in human history; some others still studied Muhammad the great military leader, by studying military prowess and systems of warfare then comparing Muhammad's achievements to the great military leaders' in human history; others yet studied Muhammad the legislator, by studying human laws and legislations then comparing Muhammad's *Sharia*' laws to the great lawmakers' and legislators' in human history.

They studied all aspects of human greatness they could find in Muhammad's life and put him in the forefront of all great human beings, way ahead of all the others!

And what's wrong with that?

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(1) Some writers in this group played a favourable and largely positive role in introducing the west to the true picture of the Prophet (pbuh). Montgomery Watt says in his *Muhammad at Mecca*: "Ever since Carlyle presented his study of Muhammad (*On Heroes and Hero Worship*), the west came to realize that there are good reasons to believe in Muhammad's honesty and truthfulness." (cit., p. 94.)

As such they were studying Muhammad the great human being and the great figurehead, blessed with the distinctive attributes of human greatness, much like any other human genius.[1] What they systematically failed to see and discuss

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(1) In his *The Messenger: the Life of Muhammad*, the British orientalist R. Bodley talks about the various subjects of the Holy 'Quran which, to him, "give clear idea about the kind of mind Muhammad was endowed with. They make one wonder how did he come to know all this?! When did he think about all that?! Where did he learn to compose such rhythmic, melodious poetry?" (*The Messenger: the Life of Muhammad* New York: Doubleday, 1964, p. 218.)

In his *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, the American author Michael Hart says: "Muhammad is the greatest political leader history has ever known." (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992, p. 18.)

Thomas Carlyle concludes his defense of Muhammad in *Heroes and Hero Worship* by saying: "Such is greatness, such is heroism, such is genius." (T. Carlyle, *Oh Heroes and Hero Worship*, cit., 317.)

In his *The Present and Future of Islam*, the orientalist Edward Montet says: "With its sheer piety and sincerity, the religious nature of Muhammad puzzles every scrupulous and honest scholar. Muhammad was primarily a religious reformer with a staunch religious belief."

In *The Life of Muhammad*, the orientalist Emil Dremenghem says: "The breadth and power of Muhammad's creative genius, his great intelligence, his insightful view of the hard facts, his self-control and wisdom, his zeal for work, his realistic life, all these make it impossible to accept falsehood as the premises of his divine call. How could it be imagined that that thing whose success appeared to be clear proof of God's support for his cause would all of a sudden turn to be false? How could anyone have the audacity to twist and pervert his mission at a time he himself saw it as sacred and fully approved by God?" He goes on to say: "Soon as they heard his important and timely sermons and speeches, the people felt a kind of attraction connecting them to the hidden secret he was leading them to." (*La Vie de Mahomet*, cit., p. 108.)

The famous French Poet Lamartine says in his *histoire de la Turquie*: "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created only arms, laws and empires. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers, which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislation, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then-inhabited world; more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs." Lamartine adds: "This is the philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational creed, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual kingdom- this is Muhammad." (A. Lamartine, *histoire de la Turquie*, Paris: V. Lecou & Paganerre, 1855, Vol. 11, pp. 276-77.)

In his book *Mohammed and the Mohammedanism* the orientalist Benjamin Bosworth Smith says that Muhammad was both a political and religious leader: "He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar; without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right

however was the conclusion they have reached over and over again- namely that Muhammad is always in the forefront of all great human figures, regardless of the specific aspect of genius under study. They even concluded that of all the other great figures, Muhammad alone possessed all attributes of greatness and combined all aspects of human genius in himself! Why?

And is this questionable, I asked?

Yes, he said. When all those scholars have reached the same conclusion, they ought to have asked themselves: why? Why Muhammad alone of all others has always been on top? Why only

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divine it was Muhammad, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports." (B. Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism* [sic.], London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1874, p. 92.)

The Canadian orientalist S. Zweimer says in his *The Orient and its Habits*: "Muhammad was beyond doubt the greatest Muslim leader. It is true to say he was at once an able religious reformer, eloquent rhetorician, brave warrior and great thinker. We should not ascribe to him anything that contradicts these attributes. The Quran he brought with him and his own history testify to the credibility and truthfulness of such a claim." Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., p. 89.

All these accounts seek in one way or another to dissociate Muhammad (pbuh) from the miraculous phenomenon of the Divine Revelation. They labour to show that what Muhammad (pbuh) came up with was only a credit to his human personality. If the word "prophet" crops up in their accounts at all, it is taken either as yet another human attribute of his, or used in the Old Testament sense of the term, i.e. a prophet like the many prophets of Biblical Israel who used to have visions and prophecies in their sleep and to whom the Books of Prophecies and Psalms are attributed. As such Muhammad (pbuh), to them, was the one who composed the Quran. This is precisely what the orientalist Edward Montet said in his *The Present and Future of Islam*. Unwittingly praising the Prophet (pbuh), he wrote: "Muhammad in Arabia was very like one of the prophets of Israel, who were highly important figures in the history of their people. It is ironic that many people remain ignorant of Muhammad and thus fail to give him his due, although- like other reformers- the details of his life were quite known to them."

Needless to say one should be wary of such orientalist accounts that pay no attention to the miraculous phenomenon of the Divine Revelation. In *The Islamic World and its Historical Issues*, the orientalist Bianca Scarcia-Amoretti shows a perceptive grasp of the reasons behind this fact. She says: "Orientalism always worked in favour of colonialism instead of bringing the two cultures closer to one another. It was a branch of scholarship instituted only to provide more efficient means and more skillful tools to penetrate deeper into the Islamic world. There is indeed a whole cultural operation that is at once veiled, sly and hypocritical. No wonder Muslims remain suspicious of whatever is said about them in the West." (B. Scarcia-Amoretti, *The Islamic World and its Historical Issues*, translated into Arabic by S. Saad, Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldoun, 1984, p. 214.)

Muhammad, of all the great human figures whose biographies we know of, combines all aspects of human greatness in his character?

They ought to have discussed this and detected the secret behind their unanimous verdicts.

And did you discover the secret others were mindless of?

Yes, he said.

Would you tell me about it?

I'm afraid I'll have to, he said, to get the benefit I expect from you in my research. Now listen.

3. The Effects of Heredity and the Environment on the Greatness of the Prophet (pbuh)

It is common belief among scholars and researchers, Father Stephano said, that the two most important factors in determining the nature of any human being, particularly the genius, are heredity and the environment.

It is agreed that the environment in which a man is born and brought up exerts a vital influence on his life, always ascribing to him many of the features that make him prominent in his society. The genius philosopher, say, should live in a philosophical environment, which was not the case with Muhammad who lived in a bedouin, illiterate, mercantilist environment.

The genius social reformer should know and read about different religions, creeds, sects and societies within a cultural milieu that is interested in such issues. Yet, here too we find that such an environment was not available to Muhammad in his bedouin, illiterate, mercantilist social milieu.

The genius military leader should similarly have lived in a military environment of battles and warfare, and similarly this was not available to Muhammad. We do not know that Muhammad took part in any battles before he was fifty. In fact he was about fifty five when he found himself for the first time leading his

followers in battle (Badre), before which he consulted some of his companions and accepted their counsel and advice.[1]

The genius legislator too should be a student of different laws and various systems of governance, both in his own days and before his time, and this was not available to Muhammad in his bedouin, illiterate, mercantile environment either.

The same goes for every other aspect of human genius and greatness.

So, did the environment Muhammad inhabited play a role in his being the greatest of the great? Definitely not, because all the people around Muhammad lived in the same environment but none of them was like him. Some, as far as I know, were not less humanly gifted than he was, yet all of them felt that Muhammad who lived amongst them was set apart and distinguished by something way beyond them all… something God almighty had specifically endowed him with of all the others. Had it not been for this one thing, many would have been able to compete with Muhammad in certain aspects of human greatness, like all children of the same environment do.

As for the factor of heredity, Father Stephano added, it is also agreed that inherited characteristics have a vital effect on man's life, always ascribing to him many of the salient attributes of his society.

If we study the characters of Muhammad's fathers and forefathers, through whatever is kept of their news in historical annals, we will find many aspects of greatness and genius among them. They were the cream de la cream of their society,[2] yet we

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(1) This was the view of Al-'Habab bin Munther in choosing the location of the battlefield, reported in Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*, Damascus: Dar Ibn Kuthair, p. 523.

(2) See *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4221. In Al-Albani, *Silsilat Al-Ahadeeth Al-Sahihah*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no 302, the Prophet (pbuh) says: "God elected Kinanah of all the descendants of Ishmael, elected Quraish of all Kinanah, Bani Hashem of all Quraish and elected me of all Bani Hashem."

shall never find anyone like Muhammad- neither among his forefathers nor among his descendants.(1)

Why? Father Stephano wondered. Why didn't any human being ever reach the status of Muhammad?

-Why did the famous French poet Lamartine categorically say: "Muhammad is the greatest man ever"?(2)

-Why did he also ask, in *The History of the Turks*, "is there, by any standards of human greatness, anyone greater than the Prophet Muhammad?"(3)

-Why would the orientalist William Draper state in his *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*: "Of all other men, the man who exerted the greatest influence on the human race… was Muhammad"?(4)

-Why would the orientalist Senerstein say: "He [Muhammad] is well above all the great figures of human history"?(5)

-Why would Thomas Carlyle make him "the hero of heroes"?(6)

-Why would the American author Michael Hart write a book entitled *The 100: A Ranking of The Most Influential Persons in History* and choose Muhammad to lead the list of the greatest?(7)

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(1) See Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 3607, in which the Byzantine king Hercules asked Abu Suffian about the Prophet (pbuh): "Had anyone of your people said something like that (Al-'Quran) before? I said, no. He said: If anyone had said something like it before, I would have thought he was only imitating him and following his example."

(2) Quoted by Dr Ahmad Al-Shalabi, *Mu'karanat Al-Adyan-Islam*, edn. vii, Cairo: Dar Al-Nahdhah Al-Arabiah, 1984, p. 292. Lamartine (1790- 1869) wrote a poem praising the Prophet (pbuh) entitled "Who Is Greater Than You, Muhammad?" translated from French by Muhammad Mukhtar Wild Abah (*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*: 9991, 6/04/2006.).

(3) *Histoire de la Turquie*, cit., p. 277.

(4) William Draper, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, London, 1875, pp. 229-230.

(5) *The Life of Muhammad*, cit., p. 18. Fares Al-Khouri, one of the most prominent Christian politicians in Syria says: "Muhammad is the greatest ever of all great figures in the world." See Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Hatha Dinuna*, Al-Daw'ha, Katar: Dar Al-Tha'kafa, 1988, pp. 250-251.

(6) T. Caryle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, cit. p. 289.

(7) Michael Hart justified his choice of the Prophet (pbuh) as the greatest figure in human history by saying: "It is that unique blend of the religious and the secular in

-Why would a group of western scholars write *The Greatest Fifty Persons in History* and also elect Muhammad the greatest of them all?(1)

Just what is the secret of Muhammad, he asked persistently?!

4. The Secret of Muhammad's Greatness (pbuh)

What *is* his secret, you think, I asked?

-I am by no means the first to discover the secret of Muhammad's unique greatness, he said. Other western scholars had discovered it before me long time ago. They were few, though. Some converted to Islam and some didn't. One of the earliest was the French poet Lamartine, who said in his book *Voyage en Orient*: "Muhammad is above people and below God. He is the Messenger by the force of reason." Further on he added: "The riddle that Muhammad solved in his mission, thereby unraveling the latent spiritual values… entitled him to the most sublime position the Creator had designed for human beings."(2)

Muhammad's character that made me believe he is the most influential person in the whole length of human history." Quoted in A. Deedat's *What the West Says about Muhammad*, translated into Arabic as *Matha Ya'kul Al-Gharb 'an Muhammad*, Cairo: Al-Mukhtar Al-Islami, 1991, P. 9. See also the book itself, *The 100*, translated into Arabic by K. Issa and A. Sabano as *Al-Mi'a Al-Awa'il*, Damascus: Dar K'utaibah, 1984, pp. 25-30.

(1) Olaf Nelson published this book in 1989. He explained that the fifty persons were selected out of eleven billion people according to one criterion: who exerted the greatest influence on the course of human history? Muhammad (pbuh) ranked first.

In an article entitled "Who Were History's Great Leaders?" *Time Magazine* (15/07/1974) asked a number of historians, writers, military men and others to select the greatest leader ever in history. The American psychoanalyst and professor at Chicago University, Jules Masserman, insisted that "Leaders must fulfill three functions- provide for the well-being of the led, provide a social organization in which people feel relatively secure, and provide them with one set of beliefs. People like Pasteur and Salk are leaders in the first sense. People like Gandhi and Confucius, on one hand, and Alexander, Caesar and Hitler on the other, are leaders in the second and perhaps the third sense. Jesus and Buddha belong in the third category alone. Perhaps the greatest leader of all times was Muhammad, who combined all three functions."

(2) Alphonse de Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient*, Paris: Honore Champion, 1835, p. 47.

That *is* the secret, Father Stephano ecstatically added, Muhammad is a Godsend Prophet. He is God's Messenger to all human beings, carrying a mission that contains the most sublime values the Creator had ordained for human beings. This is precisely why western scholars in this positive group found him always the apex of greatness in all its known aspects and attributes.

He is a Prophet and human standards fall short before the attributes of a Prophet, because his greatness is derived from the inspiration of Almighty God. Under this heading- the Godsend Messenger- and this heading alone, Muhammad's character should be studied. For only his Prophethood and his Divine Mission had enabled him to achieve what he managed to achieve; to ignore them in the study of his character would be to neglect the cornerstone on which this whole character is based. At least this is what reason says.

You're absolutely right, Father Stephano, I said. You hit the nail on the head. What you and other western scholars have reached through rational analysis is identical with what is mentioned in the original texts we have agreed to defer to.

What do the original texts say, he asked?

The venerable 'Quranic verse addresses God's Messenger (pbuh) and instructs him to "Say: I am a human being like you but only inspired that your Lord is one God."[1] Another Quranic verse says: "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets."[2]

What distinguishes Muhammad from the rest of you people, that is, does not lie in his human attributes but in his being the Godsend Messenger (pbuh) inspired by God Almighty Himself.

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(1) Al-Kahf, 110; Fusilat, 6.
(2) Al-Ahzab, 40.

5. Are Muhammad (pbuh) and Jesus (pbuh) Enemies?

I am well and truly puzzled at you, Father Stephano, I said. How could you have reached this conclusion and believed in it and you are a Christian clergyman?

It is true I am a Christian clergyman but I respect and revere all prophets. Prophets have brought us only goodness and love. Jesus himself didn't order us to disparage any of them or deny his religious mission. If we do so we'd be rather contravening the teachings of Jesus himself. Besides, who told you Muhammad and Jesus are enemies?

Some westerners seem to think so, I said.

Whoever says that is ignorant of both Muhammad and Jesus. If he'd study the life of Muhammad and know the truth about it, he could only say what George Bernard Shaw said.

And what did Shaw say, I asked?

"I have studied Muhammad and come to admire him. In my view," Shaw said, "rather than the Anti-Christ, he must be called 'the Saviour of Humanity.'"[(1)]

Now let me go back to what I was saying, Father Stephano added, to reassure you that those who followed the prophets did not do so because they were great men or geniuses. They followed them because they were Godsend human prophets.

So the attributes of greatness the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had were due to his prophethood and to the mission God had entrusted and sent him with to all human beings, weren't they?

Yes, Father Stephano said. Any study of Muhammad's character would not be of much use if it separated between this character and its prophethood. Nor would it be of any use if it separated the Quran, the true Hadeeths and the reliable accounts of the Prophet's life. For all these are constituent elements of one and the same subject.

[(1)] Quoted in A. Deedat, *What the West Says About Muhammad,* cit., p. 10. See also G. B. Shaw, *The Genuine Islam*.

As I bona fide accept this conclusion, he added, I have to study the aspects of mercy(*) for human beings in the character of Muhammad as a Prophet and as a Godsend Messenger. I am therefore adamant that I accept no aspect of this mercy unless it is underpinned by a text from the three primary sources we've agreed to defer to. And this is precisely the benefit I expect from you so as to have my study well documented and supported by reliable evidence.

With the blessings of God, I said. Where do you want us to start?

Before we start, I'd like to bring up something and discuss it with you further.

What?

As I was putting my ideas in order before I began writing, it occurred to me to introduce my study with a preface about the aspects of mercy for human beings in Muhammad's character before his Divine Call.

That's good.

But I encountered a logical problem, he said.

What is it, I asked?

6. Could the Prophet be Considered a Prophet before his Divine Call?

The conclusion I've reached so far is that the study of Muhammad's character, from any angle you look at it, must be based on the fact that he was a Prophet and Godsend Messenger. Yet only after he was forty years old did Muhammad become this Godsend Prophet and Messenger. What justifies my talking about him before the Divine Revelation, and wouldn't that be rather a flagrant self-contradiction?

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* Mercy here, as elsewhere in this book, is the collective term synonymous to kindness, compassion, leniency, pity and other closely affiliate significations. Its collective antonyms are cruelty, harshness, roughness, ruthlessness, etc.

Do you want me to answer you in accordance with the Islamic or the non-Islamic doctrines?

The Islamic, he said. I'm well-acquainted with the non-Islamic doctrines.

The Islamic doctrine in this states that the prophet does not become a prophet the moment he is Godsend and Divinely Inspired: He is born a prophet.

How come?! Can a newborn baby be a Godsend prophet?

The verses of the venerable Quran explicitly show that the Almighty God elects His human prophets and messengers from birth, before they even become foetuses in their mothers' wombs. Providence watches over them, fosters, nurses and nurtures them from birth. When they grow up and become at an age that qualifies them to carry the Divine Mission, He sends them to whomsoever He wishes to of His peoples. The 'Quranic verses say as much in relation to Moses (pbuh), fostered by the Divine Providence since he was born: "We inspired the mother of Moses to suckle him and said: if you fear for him then cast him down the river stream and neither worry nor grieve for him. We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers."(1) These, and the following, verses narrate to us the life story of Moses (pbuh) and Almighty God's Providential care for him from birth to death.

Similar 'Quranic verses tell us about John (pbuh) since the Annunciation of his father Zachariah, before he was even created as a foetus in his mother's womb: "There Zachariah prayed to his Lord and said: Grant me, my Lord, of Your own bounty some goodly offspring, for You are indeed the One who hears and answers prayers. So the angels called upon him as he stood praying in the sanctum: God gives you the glad tidings of (a son born unto you called) John (who comes) to confirm a word from God, lordly, chaste, Prophet of the righteous."(2)

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(1) Al-Kassas, 7ff.
(2) A'l-'Imran, 38-39.

Again the 'Quranic verses similarly tell us about the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary (pbuh). Here Mary speaks after the Annunciation, when the angel told her the good news of the forthcoming immaculate conception: "She [Mary] said: 'But how could I have a son, when no man has touched me, and I have never been unchaste?' He said: 'So says your Lord: That is easy for Me. We shall make him a miraculous revelation to mankind and a mercy from Us. The matter is already ordained.' So she conceived him, and withdrew with him to a distant place (i.e. Bethlehem). The labour pains drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said: "Would that I had died before this and been out of sight and mind!"(1) The preceding and the following verses tell the brief story of her immaculate conception, the birth of Jesus and the miracles that went with them.

That was the case with all Godsend messengers and prophets, Muhammad included, I added. Divine Providence was watching over him from birth, protecting, fostering and nurturing him with the cultivation and wisdom of prophets.

Any verses in Al-Quran confirm this Providential care and nurture before the Revelation, he asked?

Sure, I said. You know that Muhammad was an orphan in his childhood, poor in his youth, and unsure of the faith he had to adopt before the Revelation. Later, the 'Quranic verse came down to tell that Muhammad was not left alone at any stage of his life. Divine Providence protected him and kept him safe in all adversities he had encountered. The verses explicitly say: "Did He not find you an orphan and gave you refuge? And did He not find you at a loss (unaware of the 'Quran and of the Prophethood) and guided you? And did He not find you poor and made you self-sufficient?"(2) It was the Almighty God, that is,

(1) Mariam, 20-23.
(2) Al-Dhuha, 6, 7, 8.

who so willed it that Muhammad was given shelter, found a guardian to look after him as a child, saved him from poverty and made rich by the trading wealth of his first wife, Khadijah. Like other prophets, Muhammad before the Revelation was made by God after His own image.

My neighbour, Father Nicholas, looked at his watch and said: I hope you two would allow me to suggest something.

Sure, go ahead, I said.

I suggest that we content ourselves with what was said tonight… and continue tomorrow evening at nine, God willing.

Why?

Oh, we wouldn't like to impose any further. The Ramadan nights for Muslims are times for prayers and worship.

And this meeting, with all that went on in it, is, Good willing, a form of worship. Every meeting blessed with the verses of Al-Quran and the venerable Hadeeths is, for us Muslims, one of the many gardens of Paradise. If however you wish to leave it till tomorrow evening, it is fine with me.

Father Stephano agreed to the timing and confirmed it- tomorrow evening at nine. The two guests got up and made ready to go. I saw them to the front door and wished them a very good night as they left.

Chapter Two

Aspects of Mercy for Human Beings in the Character of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Before the Divine Call

The evening of the second day of Ramadan 1427H, nine o'clock sharp, the doorbell rang. I received the two guests and warmly welcomed them.

After a while, having done with the usual courtesies, and having fulfilled my duty to my guests, Father Stephano picked up the debate from where we left it last night:

-On the basis of what we said yesterday, I take it that I there are aspects of mercy for human beings in Muhammad's character before the Divine Call, and that I can use them in my study as an introduction to his later merciful and humane aspects after the Divine Revelation?

Yes, I said, and they are well documented in the reliable sources of the Prophet's *sirah*.

Could you give me some examples that come to your mind now?

Sure. Do you know what Muhammad's people used to call him throughout the period that preceded his Divine Call?

What?

The very people who knew him well and among whom he was born and brought up used to call him "Muhammad the Trusted One".(1) Would you say that such a man, so called by the community of people who knew him intimately, could be the

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(1) Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*, cit., p. 186. The British orientalist William Muir says in *The Life of Muhammad*: "From very early on in life, the Muslim Prophet Muhammad was by common consent called Al-Amin ("the Faithful"[sic]) by the people of his town for his good behaviour and noble morals." (W. Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, London: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p. 28.)

[The "Faithful" is *al-mu'men,* not *al-amin*/*al-ameen*. The latter term is more aptly rendered into English as "the trusted one"- Trans.]

same rough, cruel and blood-thirsty man western sources present him to be?

Reason says no. Such a man could only be pious, merciful, kind and compassionate. I think a man given such titles of honour by his own people would not as much as commit a single sin, not a single offense or wrong doing in the whole length of his life. For had he done so, his people would have clung to this single blemish to his person, which would have stuck in their minds and blotted out the kind of sanctity and respect they had for him.

That's exactly it, I said. According to all reliable accounts of his *sirah*,[1] Muhammad (pbuh) was not guilty of any sin or wrong doing, not even of a single frivolous act that we know of.[2]

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(1) In the same book, Muir says: "It is quite in keeping with the character of Mahomet (before the Prophetic Call) that he should have shrunk from the coarse and licentious practices of his youthful friends. Endowed with a refined mind and a delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself and the ponderings of his heart supplied occupation for the leisure hours spent by men of a lower stamp in rude sports and riotous living. The fair character and honourable bearing of the unobtrusive youth won, if not the approbation, at least the respect, of his fellow citizens; and he received the title, by common consent, of AL AMIN, "the Faithful." He goes on to say: "Muhammad in any case is much greater than to be described in full. He who does not know him well cannot appreciate his merits. The expert on the other hand ponders his glorious history, that history that put Muhammad in the forefront of prophets and world thinkers."

(2) In his *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*, the learned authority Abu Al-Hassan Al-Nadawi sums up the Prophet's chief character traits before the Divine Call as reported in the true accounts of the *sirah*: "The Prophet (pbuh) grew up sheltered by Divine Providence, away from Jahilite filth and abominable habits of behaviour. He was the most magnanimous of his people, the most ethical and moral, the most modest, the most truthful in what he said and did, and by far the most trusted. He was so distant from coarseness and bawdiness that went about in his time that his people called him the Trusted One. God had made him infallible and had safeguarded him from involvement in the shameful Jahilite improprieties that were not befitting him. He maintained good relations with kith and kin, honoured his guests, shouldered what weighed other people down, offered great help in the cause of goodness and piety. He ate from his own hard work and contented himself with very little." (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kuthair, 2004, p. 170.)

1. Muhammad and Zaid bin Harithah

What about those aspects of mercy in his character then, he asked?

I said: the Prophet's biographies tell us that Muhammad married his first wife, Khadijah bint Khuwailed, before the Divine Call. Khadijah had a nephew called Hakeem bin H'izam bin Khuwailed, who was a merchant trading in all kinds of goods. On one of his business trips, he returned from Bilad Al-Sham (Greater Syria) with a shipment of slaves, among them a boy called Zaid bin Harithah who just reached the age of being employed as footman or attendant. Khadijah, married to Muhammad then, visited her nephew and Hakeem wanted to show his respect for her. Choose any one of these boys and he is yours, Hakeem said to Khadijah. She chose Zaid and took him home with her. Muhammad saw the boy and his tender heart brimming with feelings of mercy and humaneness felt sorry for him. He begged of her to give the boy over to him, and she did. Muhammad instantly set the boy free and rid him of the mantle of slavery. He made Zaid a member of his own family and treated him like a father. Zaid lived his whole life as one of Muhammad's household, always showing love, admiration, trust and gratitude for this generous man.

Accounts of the Prophet's *sirah* tell us that before he was captured and sold in the slave market, Zaid had lived with his mother Sa'da and his father Harithah. The parents belonged to different tribes. Sa'ada took Zaid with her on a visit to her people and while she was with them, the tribe was raided and plundered as was common in desert life at that time. The attackers took Zaid from his mother and sold him in one of the slave markets called Hubasha Souk. The boy was still eight years old and the buyer was Khadijah's nephew, Hakeem.

Zaid's father, Haritha, was sorrowed and grieved. He never rested since the kidnapping of his son and he went all over Arabia looking for him. He wrote a touching poem about the disaster that befell him:

For Zaid my eyes out I have cried, and know not lives he still or died.

I know not what on earth he's done, alive to hope or for good gone?

I know not, Lord, about my son, and will forever be wondering on:

On plainland perished my only child? Or died alone on a mountainside?

Oh return to me my darling lad, and glad I'd give this whole world wide.

The sunrise brings him to me in the morn; the sunset too as the day's worn;

And memories within at noon are reborn as winds in the wild are blown.

Oh I'm grieved for you and sorrowed and sad, but by my Almighty God

I'll roam for you and ride like mad; never tired the camels or I would stand,

But with utmost speed and from end to end, we shall be ranging the land:

And what if death on the way I find? To hopeless doom is damned mankind.

The bereaved father never stopped looking for his kidnapped son. He moved across Arabia going from one area and one marketplace to another in search of his Zaid or at least for news about him.

At long last he heard the good news that his son is in Makkah with a member of the 'Quraish tribe. Instantly the father and a brother of his headed for Makkah, asked for Zaid and found him with Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Mu'taleb.

Haritha met his son Zaid in Muhammad's house. He was as overjoyed as a parched man in the desert stumbling across a well of cool water. He asked Muhammad to give him back his son for any ransom money he'd ask.

Do you know, Father Stephano, what did Muhammad say, a mercy to humanity that he was?

What?

He turned to Haritha and his brother and said: would you be contented with something much better than a ransom? And what's that, they asked? I give Zaid the choice- if he wishes to go with you, so be it; if he decides to stay with me, you respect his choice. More than fair, they said. Muhammad summoned Zaid and asked him: Who are those two people? Zaid said: This is my father Haritha bin Sharaheel, and this is my uncle Ka'b bin Sharaheel. You are free to choose, Zaid, Muhammad said. You can go back with them or stay on with me.

Do you know, Father Stephano, what the boy said after having at last met with his long lost father?

What did he say?

I'd rather stay with you, Zaid said to the kind and compassionate Muhammad!

Haritha was shocked. You prefer slavery to your own father and mother, to your homeland and to your own people and tribe, Zaid?! Oh what I've seen from this man, father, Zaid replied, would never make me want to part with him.

Would the boy have preferred Muhammad to his own father had he not found with him more mercy, kindness and humaneness, I asked?

After a moment's consideration Father Stephano said: if Muhammad, even before his Prophetic Call, was rough and hardhearted, the boy would not have preferred him to his own father, surely.

And do you know what happened in the end, I asked?

Obvious, I suppose, Father Stephano replied. Zaid preferred to stay with Muhammad, even if it meant a form of slavery, rather than return with his father and live in complete freedom.

Much more than that, I said.

What?

Muhammad's humaneness and mercy transcended Zaid to include his father Harithah.

How?

Muhammad felt that Zaid's father was disappointed after all he had been through looking for his son. To put his mind at ease, Muhammad took Zaid by the hand and went to the elders of 'Quraish and said: 'Bear witness, 'Qurashi people, that this is my adopted son Zaid, heir and beneficiary to all I have.' Of course, the adoption system was well in place during Al-Jahiliah and before the advent of Islam. The father Haritha, that is, was reassured about the future of his son. He was pleased with the new status of his beloved Zaid and, with the peace of mind that no harm would touch his son, Harithah left Makkah.

What happened to Zaid later on, Father Stephano asked?

He was called Zaid bin Muhammad from then on. He lived happily with his new father till God entrusted and honoured Muhammad (pbuh) with the Divine Revelation and the Islamic Mission. Zaid believed him and was one of the first people to embrace Islam, having known Muhammad's truthfulness and experienced his mercy and humaneness at close range.

People kept calling him Zaid bin Muhammad till the venerable 'Quranic verse came down to institute the rules and rights of adopted children in Islam. It instructed Muslims to "Proclaim their real parentage. That will be more equitable and fair in the sight of God. If you did not know their fathers, then (they are) your brethren in faith…"[(1)] Zaid regained his identity and proclaimed himself Zaid bin Haritha again.[(2)]

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(1) Al-Ahzab, 5.

(2) See Zaid's anecdote in Ibn Hisham's *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah,* cit., pp. 226-227, including footnote 7. See also Al-Suhaili's *Al-Raoudh Al-'Anef,* Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, pp. 186-187; Ibn Sa'd's *Al-'Tabakat Al-Kubra',* I. Abbas, ed., Damascus, no 4/41; *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no 4409; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no 4451; and Al-

2. Muhammad and Rebuilding the Ka'ba by 'Quraish

Another anecdote, I said.

I'm listening, father Stephano replied.

Five years before the Revelation, when Muhammad was about thirty five, the 'Quraish tribe embarked on renovating the Ka'ba building. The 'Qurashi people considered participation in this endeavour the greatest honour of all, and in order not to fight among themselves they divided the work. Each sept of the tribe dismantled a section of the building then used the same stones to rebuild it. The work went on well till they reached the stage where the prestigious Black Stone had to be put in place. 'Quraish revered this stone and each sept wanted to have the honour of lifting it back to its place. The squabbling turned into a feud and near battle, with different septs forming alliances against each other. One alliance, called the Blood Lickers, went as far as bring a bowlful of sacrificial blood and dipped their hands in it, in a symbolic gesture signifying their pledge to fight to death if others tried to win the honour of lifting the Black Stone back to its place in the corner of Al-Ka'ba. Things got worse and for four, five days 'Quraish was almost torn apart with internal fighting. The elders gathered by the Ka'ba to discuss the impending danger. A wise man among them suggested that they resort to arbitration. 'Qurashi people, he said, let the first man coming from this side of town adjudicate on your dispute and settle the issue as he thinks fit and you accept his verdict. Everybody agreed to the suggestion and they waited for the first comer.

Guess who the person was, Father Stephano, I said?

You tell me. Who?

Muhammad bin Abdullah was the first man to come from the direction they chose.

Albani's *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no 6142. Al-Albani said the Hadeeth is "agreed on by common consent."

And did everyone accept him to arbitrate between them?

Cries of approval rose from all sides. That's him, the Trusted One, Muhammad, and we all accept his judgment.

Muhammad didn't know what the people had agreed on. He asked about the reason for their shouting and screaming. They told him and demanded that he arbitrates between them.

And what was Muhammad's verdict, Father Stephano asked?

He hastened to ask for an ordinary Arab gown, and they brought him one. He spread it on the floor, lifted the Black Stone with his hands and put in the middle, then asked every sept leader of 'Quraish to take hold of one end of the dress and lift the Stone together. Again he took the Stone with his own hands, put it back in its rightful place in the corner of the Ka'ba then built over it.[(1)]

A wise man like that, Father Stephano said, couldn't have been rough, hardhearted or cruel. His own people wouldn't have accepted his judgment or agreed to have him as judge and arbiter in the first place.

3. Enemies Vouch for Muhammad

Another anecdote for you, Father Stephano, I said Let's have it.

Early on when the Prophet (pbuh) first declared his Islamic Mission publicly, following the revelation of the 'Quranic verse "And forewarn your tribe of closer_kindred,"[(2)] Muhammad climbed up the Safa hillside near Al-Ka'ba and called on the different septs of 'Quraish by name one after the other: "Fahr people, Udai people... and when they gathered before him he asked: What would you say if I told you there were enemy horses in the valley behind me about to raid you, would you believe me? Yes, they said: We've known nothing about you except what is honest and truthful…"[(3)]

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(1) See Ibn Hisham's *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*, cit., p. 185. See also Al-Albani's *Sahih Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*, cit., pp. 44-45.

(2) Al-Shu'ra': 214.

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no 4397; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no 307.

Now those same people became Muhammad's deadliest enemies after his Divine Call. Wasn't that a true testimony to Muhammad's noble status before the Revelation- and by his own future enemies?

Yes, Father Stephano said, and this confirms what was said earlier.

4. Friends Vouch for Muhammad

Shall I give you more examples to further clarify Muhammad's character traits before the Revelation, I asked?

Yes, if you can be brief, he said.

As you like. Do you find the man who is kind to his kith and kin, who keeps in close touch with them and makes sure that they need nothing, do you find him a humane and merciful or rough and cruel person?

Humane and merciful rather, he said.

And the man who takes to heart the weak and the needy, who provides for them and gives them enough to live on, is he humane and merciful or a cruel and hard-hearted person?

Humane and merciful, he said.

And the man who gives the needy and the disadvantaged from his own money, is he humane and merciful or a hard and cruel person?

Humane and merciful, he said.

And the man who honours his guests and is generous to them, is he humane and merciful or a rough and cruel person?

Humane and merciful,he said.

And the man who hastens to help the calamity-stricken, victims of disasters and the down and out people, is he humane and merciful or a harsh and cruel person?

Human and merciful, he said, but why do you ask?

What if a reliable witness testified to all these attributes in Muhammad's character?

Who is this witness who knows the man so well, he asked?

Would you accept the testimony of his first wife, Khadijah bint Khuwailed, who lived with him before and after the Revelation?

Yes. A man's wife knows best the truth about him, on the condition that her testimony is documented in the original texts we've agreed to defer to.

In *Sahih Al-Bukhari* it is reported that Khadijah said to her husband Muhammad, describing his character traits as she knew them in the days of Al-Jahiliah before the Revelation and the advent of Islam: "By God, the Lord shall never let you down. Why, you are kind to your kith and kin, you help the poor and the destitute, provide generously for your guests, offer assistance to the needy and the afflicted people."[1]

Now can a man like that be rough, hardhearted and cruel, I asked?

By no means, he said. I attest that such a man cannot be but a compassionate, merciful, loving and lovable person.

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[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no 3; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no 231.

Chapter Three

Introducing Muhammad (pbuh)

A few sips of bitter coffee to help us keep up the vigorous debate. Then Father Stephano said: I think I've heard enough about aspects of Muhammad's mercy and humaneness before the Divine Call. I'd like us to move now to aspects of his mercy for human beings after the Divine Revelation and the Islamic Mission. First, though, I'd like you to tell me more about Muhammad himself, introduce me to him, sum up the salient traits of his character for me. I'd like to see him in my mind's eye, draw a definitive picture of him in my imagination. I'd like to fit the aspects of humaneness and mercy into that image.

Fine, I said. As you wish.

1. His Attributes (pbuh)

The Divine nurture and cultivation with which Almighty God had schooled all His prophets blessed Muhammad from the start with a virtuous and righteous character. This is in fact what won him the praise of Almighty God Himself. In the venerable 'Quran, the Lord says: "Indeed, you (Muhammad) are of an exalted ethical character."(1)

And what was the nature of that exalted character that set Muhammad apart? What made him so special and different from other great human figures that he merited the praise of his God, asked Father Stephano?

Oh, this is such a broad topic indeed, I said. To tell you about it in detail would be to tell you about the whole bulk of Islamic ethics, codes of behaviour and forms of worship. I can sum it all up however in one brief sentence reported by the closest person to the Prophet, his wife 'A'isha, who knew him perhaps more intimately than any other person. 'A'isha was asked once what

(1) Al-'Kalam: 4.

was Muhammad's ethical character like? She succinctly said: "His ethics were the 'Quran itself".[1]

What the 'Quran contains, I added, is well known and accessible to people. Whoever reads it and thoughtfully reflects on its meanings and implications can reach that exalted ethical character that distinguished Muhammad and set him apart from others, before as well as after the Divine Call. For Muhammad (pbuh) was the 'Quran incarnate.

What did you say, Father Stephano hastened to ask?

I said Muhammad was the 'Quran incarnate.

The turn of the phrase makes me eager to see this Man-'Quran walking on earth!

Would you like to see him?

I do, indeed. Do you have a picture of him?

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Fuad Abdulbaki's edn., Hadeeth no 746. The orientalist Hedley says in the "Introduction" to Etienne Dinet's *Mahomet the Messenger*: "We consider the honorable Prophet of Arabia endowed with sublime morals and a realistic, stable character tested in every step on the way and every station in his life. Not the slightest blemish is seen… Perhaps we all need a perfect model against which we measure the steps we ourselves take in the various paths of our lives. The life of the Prophet Muhammad fulfills this standard need…. The life of Muhammad is a mirror before us reflecting sublime reason, generosity, courage, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, kindness and all the other quintessential codes of moral behaviour that make up humanity… We see them all before us in bright colours… Take any aspect of moral behaviour and you are sure to find it embodied in one of the many stations in Muhammad's eventful life." (E. Dinet, *Mahomet the Messenger*, translated into Arabic by A. Mahmud, Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1979, p. 134.)

The orientalist Washington Irving says in his *Muhammad and his Successors*: "He [Muhammad] was just. He treated friends and strangers, the rich and poor, the powerful and weak, with equity, and was beloved by the common people for the affability with which he received them and listened to their complaints." (W. Irving, *Muhammad and His Successors*, London: Darf, 1985, p. 453.)

Towards the end of *The Arabs*, Edward Montet writes "Muhammad was known for his honest intentions, mildness, fairness, impartiality and scrupulousness."

In *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, the orientalist Edward Lane wrote: "Muhammad was characterized by many moral attributes like kindness, courage and ethical behaviour, so much so that one cannot judge him without being influenced by the impact these attributes impinge on him."(E. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1836, p. 210.)

Impossible, I said, but there is something as good as the picture.

What, he asked?

2. His Complexions (pbuh)

If you go back to the true accounts of the Prophet's *sirah*, you'll find that they present highly detailed, almost tip-to-toe descriptions of the Prophet's complexions and physical appearance. A comprehensive picture of the person accorded all these attributes inevitably impinges on the reader's imagination.

You could sum them up for me, couldn't you?

Sure, with pleasure.

The Prophet (pbuh) was upright and of medium build, neither tall nor short, with a massive head and a thick mass of black, lanky hair. His round, rosy face was broad fronted, with black arched eyebrows. The colour of his very big eyes was at once extremely black and extremely white, encircled with long black eyelashes. An aquiline nose below the bright eyes and below that a full mouth, surrounded by a thick, black beard. The massive head stood erect on a long-ish neck, broad shoulders and a broad chest. His belly was never bulging but completely flat level with his chest. Two chubby arms fell on each side of the body, ending with two big hands of soft and fleshy palms. The whole well-developed body rested on strong, plump legs and big feet.(1)

(1) These descriptions are found in *Sahih Al- Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, though often reported in old Arabic terminology. Like others, Al-Bara' bin 'Azeb for instance describes the Prophet (pbuh) as follows: "The Prophet (pbuh) had the most beautiful face and form I've ever seen. He was neither too tall to stand out nor too short." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no 2385; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no 4310- agreed on by common consent). Al-Bara' also said: "The Prophet (pbuh) was of medium build, broad-shouldered, with a thick beard reaching the lopes of his ears. I saw him (pbuh) once wearing some red garment and I have never seen anything like him. Nothing is as beautiful." (Al-Albani's *Mishkat Al-Masabeih*, Hadeeth no 5783- agreed on by common consent.)

Ali bin Abi 'Taleb said: "The Prophet (pbuh) was neither tall nor short, with massive head and beard, big hands and feet. He was rosy-cheeked, broad-shouldered, long-

You've delineated a man full of masculine strength and beauty, he said.

That was him.

Could I add to your previous statement, then, having heard his physical descriptions, Muhammad was a forceful Man-'Quran walking.

You're right.

So what's wrong with Muslims today, walking the earth as if they were a weakling 'Quran he wondered?

The 'Quran doesn't weaken; it is preserved by the will of God. As the Almighty Lord says: "We have sent down the Message ('Quran) and We shall preserve hereafter."(1) It is rather we Muslims have weakened, precisely because we've steered away from the path of our 'Quran. We have weakened ourselves and slowed down our march by our own hands.

Quite right, he said. The distance between you, Muslims, and your 'Quran is the measure of both your strength and weakness. The shorter the distance separating you the stronger you get; the farther the weaker. And your enemies down the ages have known this balancing act full well. They have even forthrightly expressed it. Maybe the most vociferous western declaration in this respect was what Gladstone, the British prime minister, said in the House of Commons in 1882. Gladstone held the 'Quran in one hand

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necked, chunky, fast walker, stooping forward as if descending a hill. I've never seen anything like him, before or after." (Albani's *Mishkat Al-Masabeih,* Hadeeth no. 5790, and he said it is "authentic.")

Abu Hurairah said: "He (pbuh) had long arms, long eyelashes and broad shoulders. He walked solidly and gracefully, was neither bawdy nor licentious, and he was soft spoken and low voiced." (Al-Albani's *Al-Silsilah Al-sahiha*, Hadeeth no. 2095.)

See also the Hadeeth reported by Hind bint Abi Halah in describing the physical attributes and the moral being of the Prophet (pbuh) as reported by Al-Hassan bin Ali (in Al-Baiha'ki's *Dalai'l Al-Nubuwa*h, electronic copy, Hadeeth no 236.). See also the subsequent Hadeeth by Ali bin Abi 'Taleb, reported by Al-Husain bin Ali, Hadeeth no 237. If they prove to be authentic, both Hadeeths are the most commonly agreed on in this respect.

(1) Al-Hijre: 9.

and said: "So long as this 'Quran is in the hands of Muslims, Europe shall not be able to control the East."[1]

I wish to God someone would listen to what you have rightly said.[2]

3. His Dress (pbuh)

To go back to Muhammad's physical descriptions and to complete the image of this strong and appealing character in my mind, Father Stephano said, could you tell me what did he usually wear?

I could, I said. He wore a turban on his head, with a dangling tassel between his shoulders.

What colour?

Most often white, but sometimes yellow or black.

And what?

He wore a sown *thawb*,* often made of rough material, half way down his legs or just above his heels. Underneath the dress he wore a loincloth or breeches.

What colour?

Often white, I said, but again it could be black, red, yellow or striped.

And his shoes?

Tanned leather sandals, bare at the back with shoelaces and toe holes in the front.

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[1] Quoted in A. Deedat's *Matha Ya'kul Al-Gharb 'an Muhammad*, cit. p. 9.

[2] The Italian orientalist Laura-Viccini Vagliery says about Al-Quran: "To this pure source and to no other Muslims shall return, and when they go back to well up the waters of this sacred source they will doubtlessly regain their former strength." Quoted by M. A. H. Bin 'Amer, *Al-Mustashr'koon wa Al-'Quran*, Irbed, Jordan: Dar Al-Amal, 2004, p. 289.

* Very like *djalabiah*.

Fine. I got the picture. You've described the modest clothes of hermits and ascetics.[1]

4. The Environment He (pbuh) Inhabited

Don't you think that this picture needs a frame, he asked?

What do you mean?

The frame of Muhammad's picture is the surrounding social environment in which this unique and modest character was born and brought up. Won't you briefly tell me about the social milieu in the beginning of the seventh century.

The Arab or the international social context you want?

The Arab. I am well acquainted with the kind of corruption the international community- Persian, Byzantine and other- was wallowing in.[2]

It'd take very long to start telling you in detail about the Arab society in the Jahilite environment. I'll give you however a brief description posited by a transitional figure who lived in the social milieu of both eras. What he said was a kind of comparison between the Arab Jahilite society and the Islamic society God had proclaimed and made manifest at the hands of Muhammad (pbuh).

This is precisely what I want, he said.

The true accounts of the Prophet's *sirah* tell us that the Negus, king of Ethiopia, summoned to his court a delegation of the Muslim emigrants who sought refuge in his country. He wanted to ask them about this new Prophet who appeared in their native town, Makkah, and whom they followed and were willing to leave their homeland for his sake. The Muslim delegation nominated Ja'far bin Abi 'Taleb to speak for them and

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(1) Hadeeths relating to the Prophet's attire are cited in *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim* and other books and accounts of the Prophet's *sirah*.

(2) See in this regard Abi Al-Hassan Al-Nadawi, *Matha Khasira Al-'Alam binhit'at Al-Muslimeen* (*What World Lost by the Decline of Muslims)*. See also the first chapter of his *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah*.

answer the questions of the Negus. "Great king," he said, "we were ignorant people who lived in the dark days of Al-Jahiliah. We worshipped idols, ate the flesh dead animals, committed all kinds of vices and abominations, severed the bonds of kith and kin, harmed our neighbours, abided by the laws of the jungle where the strong oppresses the weak. Then the Almighty Lord sent us a Messenger from our own people. We know his ancestral lineage, we know his truthfulness, his honesty, his virtue and righteousness. He called us to believe in the oneness of God Almighty and to worship Him alone, rid ourselves of the idols, statues, stones and false gods we and our forefathers had worshipped. He ordered us to be truthful in whatever we say, to give back whatever was entrusted to us, to maintain the bonds of kith and kin, to keep good relations with our neighbours, to abstain from sinful behaviour and bloodshed, to refrain from giving false testimony, from stealing the rightful possessions of orphans and other disadvantaged people, from falsely accusing chaste and virtuous people. He ordered us to worship God alone and ascribe no partners unto Him; he ordered us to pray and fast and give charity tax (*zakat*) money to the poor and the needy. So we believed in him, accepted his faith… and followed him in accordance with what he brought along from the Almighty Lord."[1]

You've been a great help, Father Stephano said, may the Lord help and reward you. You've given me a succinct resume of Muhammad, his Faith and his society. You've illumined the way ahead for me in my research. Now I wouldn't return empty handed to tackling the "Aspects of mercy for human beings in Muhammad's Character".

My neighbour, Father Nicholas, looked at his watch and said:

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(1) Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah,* cit., pp. 297-98. See also Al-Suhaili's *Al-Rawdh Al-'Anef*, vol. ii, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, nd., p. 87. Al-Albani edited this Hadeeth in his *Fi'kh Al-Sirah* (by Al-Ghazali), electronic copy, vol. 1, p. 115. He said it is "authentic."

Could I possibly repeat yesterday's suggestion- that we content ourselves with what was said tonight and agree to continue tomorrow evening at nine?

Fine with me, if that's your wish, I said.

On one condition, though, Father Stephano said.

What, I asked?

That we continue tomorrow to the very end. As your saying goes, the Arab guest has three nights of hospitality, and tomorrow is our third. It wouldn't be proper to impose on you any further.

As you wish, with God's blessings.

The two guests stood and made ready to leave. I walked them to the door and wished them a very good night.

Chapter Four

Aspects of Mercy for Human Beings in the Character of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) After the Divine Call

The School of Mercy

The evening of the third day of Ramadan 1427H., nine o'clock sharp, the doorbell rang. I received my two guests and warmly welcomed them.

After a short while, having settled down and finished with the usual courtesies, and having fulfilled my Islamic duty to honour and be hospitable to my guests, Father Stephano picked up the debate from where we left the night before. He said:

-I must say that I've been exploring these aspects of mercy in Muhammad's character, indeed in the Arab character at large, ever since I read a curious statement made by an intelligent western historian. He said: "History has never known a more merciful conqueror than the Arabs."(1) I found it a tribute to the merciful nature of the Arab people in general, because these conquerors were only a representative sample of the whole range of the Arab people.

Every Arab reading this statement, I said, must feel obliged to the person who said it for the noble feelings he had for Arabs. Still, had this person delved deeper into historical evidence and objective historical truth, he would have substantially modified his statement. He would have rather said: "History has never known a more merciful conqueror than the students of the school of Muhammad."

What calls for this modification to a statement said in the context of praise and admiration, he asked?

Because the Arabs before Muhammad (pbuh) were only a group of rough bedouins who fought long and crushing battles

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(1) This was said by the French orientalist Gustav Lebon in his *Arab Civilization,* A. Zu'aiter, trans., Beirut: Dar 'I'hia' Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1956.)

among themselves for the sake of a camel sometimes, or a horse or even a silly bet. Some of them buried their girls alive to rid themselves of the shame of having a baby girl rather than a baby boy born to them. About those people in particular the 'Quranic verse says: "When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he is filled with oppressive inward grief. With shame he hides himself from his people for the bad news he had received, constantly wondering: Should he take it in humiliation, or bury his shame in the dust. And what a bad judgment they had often made."(1) They weren't in fact any less cruel than other peoples at the time.(2)

When the Messenger (pbuh) was Godsend, the Arab situation changed radically. The Arabs entered the school of Muhammad rough and hardhearted people, and they graduated the most merciful people the history of conquerors has ever known.(3)

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(1) Al-Na'hl: 58-59.

(2) Tolstoy (1828-1910) said: "It is enough pride for Muhammad that he saved a bloody nation from the claws of its old and ugly customs and opened for it the way to progress and civilization. Muhammad's Islamic *sharia'* laws will dominate the world because they are in perfect harmony with reason and wisdom." Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., p. 121.

(3) The French orientalist Gustav Duka says in *The History of Muslim Philosophers and Theological Scholars*: "The Islamic religion exerted a great influence on the moral cultivation of its nations, on nurturing their sublime feelings and emotions and steadily elevating them. If you read the history of the Arabs before the advent of the Islamic Mission, if you fully realized the state they were in, you would surely come to believe that the tolerant Islamic *sharia'* played a pivotal role in nurturing and cultivating their codes of moral and ethical behaviour. Soon as that Islamic spiritual and civil reformation reached the Arab nation, justice spread, aggression ceased, lies and hypocrisy stopped."

The French orientalist Edward Montet says towards the end of his book *The Arabs*: "Muhammad directed the Arabs to a kind of life they had never dreamed of before. He established a theological and civil state for them that is still in place and alive in our present day."

The orientalist Annie Beasant says in *The Life and Teachings of Muhammad*: "It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great prophet of Arabia, who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great messengers of the Supreme. And although in what I put to you I shall say many things which may be familiar to many, yet I myself feel whenever I re-read them, a new way of admiration, a new way of reverence for that mighty Arabian teacher."(Madras: 1932, p. 4.)

So it is the school of Muhammad that taught Arab conquerors mercy, isn't it?

Yes, I said.

And what did Muhammad teach in this school of his, he asked?

Only mercy, I said.

How come, he asked, somewhat taken aback. The Arabs came out of this school with a complete religion which they spread across the world and which was accepted and embraced by so many peoples!

Do you know what religion Muhammad taught to people in his school?

Islam, he said.

And Islam itself is the religion of mercy, nothing more nothing less.

But how, he asked? Please explain.

In the venerable 'Quran, Almighty God directly addresses His Messenger Muhammad (pbuh), stating the reason for sending him to people: "We have sent you only as a mercy to all the worlds."[(1)] Do you see in this anything other than mercy asked of the Prophet to offer to human beings?

No, the 'Quranic verse specifies the purpose and the objective of Muhammad's Mission in exclusive terms- *only* mercy.

And do you know what that means, I asked?

What?

It means that everything the Godsend Muhammad (pbuh) had brought from the Lord Almighty, all the forms of worship, codes of ethics, ways of dealing with others, morals, rights and duties that his Mission contained… everything was instituted on the principle of mercy for all people!

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(1) Al-Anbia': 107.

Even the Islamic penal laws, I added, the sanctions, the censures, the limits… they are all a kind of mercy for human beings. They are meant to eradicate evil and prevent corruption from prevailing in human societies. Today, as you know, corruption and evil are rampant in all societies, due to the laws and legislations posited by human lawmakers for human beings, abandoning what God Almighty had instituted for mankind at large.(1)

I agree with you, he said. Please tell me about the way Muhammad used to teach people mercy in his school.

-The Road to Mercy in Muhammad's School

Muhammad (pbuh) used to show people the way to mercy, first, by teaching them humility and kindness.

How exactly did he teach people humility, Father Stephano asked.

It is reported that he said: "God revealed to me that you should be humble and modest, that no one goes round bragging and proud-boasting, that no one oppresses the other."(2)

He used to set himself as an example, saying: "God made me a noble servant of His, not a willful and intransient despot."(3)

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(1) In the Introduction to Etienne Dinet's *Muhammad the Messenger of God,* the orientalist Hedley says: "If every individual in the English Empire was a true Mahomedian in heart and soul, administering laws would be much easier than it is at present, because people would be working in accordance with the teachings of a true religion." (Cit., p. 10.)

George Bernard Shaw believed that if Muhammad were to assume the management and ruling of "the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring to it the much needed peace and happiness." Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb,* cit., p. 87.

The French scholar Leon Rosches says in his *Trent-deux ans a travers L'Islam*: "I have found in Islam the best religion I know of. It is a human, natural, economic and literary religion. I have never thought of any man-made law but found it enacted and legislated for in Islam. I even returned to the charter of what J. Simon calls the "Natural Legislation" and found it taken from the Islamic *sharia'* laws." (L. Roches, *Trent-deux ans a travers L'Islam,* Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884, p. 143.)

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* no. 570.

(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 393.

He often asked people not to glorify him or overestimate his significance. He said: "People! Don't give me a higher status than the One God had accorded to me. God had taken me as His servant before he made me His Prophet."[1]

He did not approve of people panegyrizing and eulogizing him. It is reported that a man addressed him saying: "Muhammad, our master and son of our master, our best and son of our best. The Prophet (pbuh) interrupted him saying: 'People! Hold on to your piety! Let proud Satan tempt you not and win you not over to his side. I am only Muhammad son of Abdullah, the servant of God and His Messenger. I wouldn't like you to elevate me to a higher position than the one Almighty God had accorded me.'"[2]

He forbade people to sing his praises. He said: "Do not flatter me the way Christians flattered the son of Mary. I am only the servant of God, so address me as Muhammad the servant of God and His messenger."[3]

Having set himself as an example, the Prophet (pbuh) foretold well being to whoever upheld this edict. He said: "No one ever humbled himself to God without God lifting and sublimating him."[4]

Still, for all his humility, the Prophet (pbuh) had dignity and awesome presence. A man came to see him once and shook with trepidation and fear. The Prophet (pbuh), mild and modest as ever, said: "Take it easy, man, I am no king. I am the son of an ordinary 'Qurashi woman who used to eat jerked meat."[5]

Fine, I have a fair idea now about the way he taught people humility, Father Stephano said. Tell me about his teaching them kindness.

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2550.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1097.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 3189.
(4) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4689.
(5) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 1876.

"Never was kindness in something," the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "without beautifying it; and never was kindness taken out of something without sullying and disgracing it."[1]

He also taught that kindness is a characteristic attribute of Almighty God Himself, and is one aspect of His mercy and compassion. He said: "God is kind and loves kindness. He rewards kindness in a way He does not accord to cruelty and violence."[2]

Kindness in essence, I added, is making things easy for oneself and for others, within the parameters of what the *Sharia*' laws permit. No wonder the slogan of Muhammad's school (pbuh) was: "Ease (things) up and don't make (life) hard; bring people (joy and) good tidings and don't put them off."[3]

-The Source of Mercy in the School of Muhammad (pbuh)

I suppose that'll do about the road to mercy, Father Stephano said. I would like us to hit mercy itself now. How did Muhammad teach mercy in his school?

I'd like to tell you something first.

What?

Wouldn't you want to know the source from which Muhammad (pbuh) learnt mercy well enough to be able to teach it to people?

By God, yes, he said.

He learnt mercy from the book that came down to him and taught him the entire corpus of Islam- the Venerable 'Quran.

Yes, I know that.

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2594.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hedeeth no. 6927; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2593.
(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 2647. He said it is "authentic," as narrated by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

But do you know how many times the word mercy and its derivatives crop up in Al-'Quran?

No, I don't, he said.

Count with me, then, I said:

1. The word "Mercy" (*ra'hmah*) is repeated 79 times as a single noun.
2. The word "Mercy"(*ra'hmah*) is repeated 35 times as governed noun conjoined to various pronouns.
3. The "Compassionate" (*Al-Ra'hman*) is repeated 57 times as a proper noun.
4. The "Merciful" (*Al-Ra'heem*) is repeated 115 times as a proper noun.
5. "The merciful people" (*Al-ra'himeen*) is repeated 6 times as a sound masculine plural noun.
6. "The merciful people" (*ru'hama*) is mentioned once as a broken plural noun.
7. The word (*al-mar'hamah*) "clemency" is mentioned once.
8. The comparative noun "more merciful" (*ar'ham*) is repeated four times.
9. The past verb "showed mercy" (*ra'hima*) is repeated eight times.
10. The present verb "showing mercy" (*yar'hamu*) is repeated fifteen times.
11. The imperative verb "be merciful" (*ir'ham*) is repeated five times.[1]

[1] See the item "ra'hima" in Muhammad Fuad Abdulba'ki's *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufahras li-Alfath Al-'Quran* (*Concordance of 'Quranic Terms*), Cairo: Kitab Al-Sh'ab.

What does this signify, I added?

If I read the Quran, he said, and found all these appellations… I'd come to the sure conclusion that it is the book from which Muslims learn mercy. Incidentally, this confirms what the German orientalist Reverend Mishaun said in his book *Religious Tourism in the Orient*.

What did he say, I asked?

Having seen the intimacy, compassion and mercy prevailing in the Islamic society, he said: "It is sad that Christians learn from Muslims the spirit of tolerance and the virtues of justice and fair dealing, which are the most sacred rules and virtues of benevolence and mercy for all peoples."[1]

Now I know the secret of what Reverend Mishaun saw in the Islamic society, he added.

If the venerable 'Quran itself taught mercy and compassion to all Muslims, how about the Prophet himself to whom the 'Quran was revealed? Wouldn't he be the first to learn from it, I wondered?

I agree with you on this, and I'd like to know how did Muhammad distil and draw out mercy from this primary source then convey it to the people in his school.

The Godsend Prophet (pbuh) relied on the mercy God Almighty had naturally endowed him with and subsequently accomplished its teaching to him in the 'Quran. This composite mercy is of two kinds:

General mercy addressed to all human beings; and

-Specific mercy addressed to a specific segment of people. It is exclusively enjoyed by those who believe in the Islamic Faith and are members of the Islamic community.

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[1] Quoted in Dr Abdulhaleem Mahmud, *Awrupa wa Al-Islam,* Cairo: Dar Al-Sh'ab, 1972, p. 80.

Muhammad (pbuh) set himself as an example to follow and as a teacher of both kinds of mercy.

General Mercy

Well, then, tell me first about the general mercy, Father Stephano said. How did Muhammad teach it in his school?

The 'Quranic verse I mentioned earlier, "We sent you only as a mercy to the worlds,"(1) can well serve as the broad title for this generic kind of mercy involving all human beings.

It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Failed and lost is he in whose heart God had put no mercy for other human beings."(2)

Lost and failed indeed, Father Stephano said. It is a curse put on all harsh and hardhearted people. This is one, is there another?

Yes, it is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "He who does not show mercy is not shown mercy; he who does not forgive is not forgiven."(3)

Yes, by God, *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye- fair punishment for the cruel and the merciless. A third one?

Yes, it is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "The merciful (people) are shown mercy by the Most Merciful and Compassionate, God Almighty Himself. Show mercy to the people of the earth you will be shown mercy by the people of Heaven."(4)

Yes, good news to the merciful. The fourth?

It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "By He Who Has my soul in His Hand, the Lord confers not His mercy save on the

(1) Al-'Anbia': 107. The orientalist Max van Brechem says in the Introduction to his book *The Arabs in Asia*: "Truth is, Muhammad was the pride and joy of humanity at large. It was he who brought to it absolute mercy. The very rubric of his Mission was: "We sent you only as a mercy to the worlds."

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, cit., Hadeeth no. 456

(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 483.

(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 925.

merciful people. We said: We all show mercy. Not to one's friends and pals alone, he said, show mercy to all people."[1]

Yes, by God, true mercy goes beyond close relatives to humanity at large.

Do you see the intended mercy in these Hadeeths specific or exclusive to a certain group of people? Or is it rather addressed to all human beings?

An all-embracing mercy involving all human beings indeed, he said.

I suppose you are going to tell me now about the specific kind of mercy Muhammad addressed to people in the Islamic society, he added.

Yes, I said.

Would you tell me first about this Islamic society Muhammad had founded. How did he actually build this society? Did he lay its foundations on the bases of mercy or on coercion and violence?

On mercy coupled with love rather.

How? How did the aspects of mercy and love manifest and reflect themselves in the building of this Islamic society? I'd like you to elaborate on this point, with reference to the primary sources and original texts of course.

The Society of Mercy

Perhaps the most important aspect of mercy a humane shepherd can show to his flock is to teach them how to build the close-knit society of love, mercy and compassion. Muhammad (pbuh) was trying to do just that when he said: "In their exchange of mutual love, mercy and compassion, the faithful Muslims are

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[1] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 167.

like the one body. If any organ suffers an ailment, the whole body responds with care and attention."[1]

He used to guide his people to the best way to consolidate this organic community of mercy. "No one (really) believes (in Islam)," the Prophet said, "unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."[2]

A beautiful thing to say, but how would the people concerned put it to practice in the real world, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) himself taught them how to apply it. He said: "No two Muslims meet and shake hands without being forgiven their sins even before they go their separate ways."[3] He also said: "Guard against hell by giving the needy even a single date, he who has it, or by a good word he who doesn't."[4] He told his people: "You wouldn't go to Heaven unless you believed in God, and you wouldn't believe in God unless you loved one another. Shall I tell you about one thing if you do it you'll love one another? Exchange greetings (and address one another in a friendly and affectionate way)."[5] He also said: "Religion is good counsel. To whom, they asked? The Prophet said: To God, His Book, His Prophet, to Muslim elders and to the common people."[6]

This way the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) built the society of mercy and love… by spreading the good word, the hearty handshake, the exchange of greetings, the advice and good counsel of one Muslim to another. Could such a society be harsh and cruel?

A society built on such foundations, a school teaching such values to its students, could only yield philanthropists and

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, cit., Hadeeth no. 73.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1083.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 525.
(4) Al-Iraqi, *Takhreej Ahadeeth Al-I'hia'*, Hadeeth no. 872. He said it is "agreed on by common consent'.
(5) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 81.
(6) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 82.

compassionate, merciful and humane people, Father Stephano said.

The duty of the good and merciful shepherd is also to spread peace and security among his people and this is precisely what the Prophet (pbuh) called for when he said: "The best of Muslims is he who spares Muslims the harm of his hand and tongue."(1)

"Shall I tell you who the faithful believer is," the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have asked? "It is he to whom Muslims can entrust themselves and their possessions; the faithful Muslim is he who spares Muslims the harm of his hand and tongue; the *Jihadist* [holy warrior] is he who struggles with himself to obey God; the *Muhajer* [Emigrant] is he who leaves behind his sins and wrong doing."(2)

A Muslim came to the Prophet once and asked him about the best thing that brings him closest to God. The Prophet offered him guidance to some good deeds. And what if I couldn't do them, the man asked? "Save people from harm, then," the Prophet (pbuh) said, "for this too is a charity you hand out to yourself."(3)

The Prophet always instructed people to spread and proliferate charity in the Islamic society.

Why, asked Father Stephano, was the Islamic society so impoverished?

Hang on, I said. Charity in the Islamic society is more given by the poor to the rich than the other way round.

How, he wondered?

When the Prophet (pbuh) guided his people to spread charity in the Islamic society, he said: "Each and every Muslim is obliged to give charity. What if he did not have anything to give, they said? Then he must work with his own hands, earn money for

(1) Al-Iraqi, *Takhreej Ahadeeth Al-I'hia'*, Hadeeth no. 1843. He said it is "agreed on."
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 549
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 2334.

himself and give some in charity to others. And what if he couldn't, they said? Then he must give a helping hand to the one who needs it. And what if he couldn't? Then he must commend good deeds being done. And if he didn't? Then he must abstain from doing harm to others, for this is also an act of charity counted for him."(1)

With this kind of merciful guidance that makes the good desirable and the bad anathema and loathsome, I added, Muslim subjects were able to conquer evil and spread peace and security in the Islamic society.(2)

How marvelous it'd be for peace and security to prevail in a society without the need for intelligence services and ministries of the interior, Father Stephano said. How wonderful it'd be for the good word alone, brimming with kindness and mercy, to be sufficient. Still, he added, this cannot be achieved unless the people themselves are free from the bad elements in society, which is practically impossible.

The Prophet's mercy for his people did not overlook the existence of this bad element, I said. And he frequently dealt with it, saying: "He who eats a meal by cheating another Muslim, God will feed him the same meal in hell; he who wears a dress by swindling another Muslim, God will clothe him the same garment in hell; and he who exposes the faults of another Muslim, God will expose his faults in hell."(3)

With such guidance that targets man from within, the bad element was almost conquered.

He said: Muhammad had indeed managed to turn the conscience of every Muslim into an alter ego that never stops watching over him!

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 5563; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1676.

(2) One residual effect of this is the sense of security that allowed shopkeepers and traders in the Islamic society to go home and leave their merchandise exhibited openly all night long without it ever being stolen or in any way damaged. This is still common in some Islamic countries that apply the Islamic *Sharia'* Law today. I myself saw it in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha*, Hadeeth no. 934.

Nor should the good and merciful shepherd ignore the public places and public utilities of his people, especially the roads. And the Prophet (pbuh), I added, did not ignore this aspect in building the Islamic society. His friend Abu Hurairah reported that he once told the Prophet (pbuh): "Teach me something that would be of use to me, Prophet of God. Clear the harm off Muslim ways, said the Prophet (pbuh)."[(1)]

You see, this merciful shepherd had turned even garbage collecting into a respectable profession that pleads for the binman on the Day of Judgment. It is useful to him in both this life and the afterlife. This was sufficient for all Muslims, common or elite, to get involved in cleaning and removing harm off their streets.

As for the bad element here, the Prophet (pbuh) dealt with it, saying: "Whoever harms Muslims in their roads, he deserves their curses."[(2)]

That's how streets and roads were kept clean and safe with no need for guards and policemen, I said.

And who in his right mind would compare guards and policemen to the watchful eye of conscience, he wondered?!

Nor should the good and merciful shepherd overtax his people or burden anyone with what is beyond their powers. The Prophet (pbuh) was always worried about that and he said: "When I tell you to do something, do as much of it as you can."[(3)]

He tried to make things easy to help people and keep them away from difficult and hard tasks, especially when an easier option is at hand. Again, as always, he set himself as an example. It is reported that his wife 'A'isha said: "Never was the Prophet given the choice between two things but went for the easier

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[(1)] Al-Iraqi, *Takhreej Ahadeeth Al-I'hia'*, Hadeeth no. 1846. He said it is "agreed on."
[(2)] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2294.
[(3)] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 7288; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1337.

option, unless it was a sinful act, in which case he would be farthest from it."[1]

Surely, Father Stephano said, making things easy for people and relieving them from hardship is one of the most important aspects of being merciful with them.

Equally importantly, I added, the good and merciful shepherd forgives his people the errors they make, even to his person. Anas bin Malek, the friend and attendant of the Prophet (pbuh), reported: "I was walking with the Prophet (pbuh) and he was wearing some Najrani garment made of rough material. A bedouin caught up with him from behind and gave him such a pull by his dress. I could see the marks the rough garment left on the Prophet's shoulders [Anas said]. Hey you, Muhammad, the bedouin said: Order some of God's money in your possession to be given to me. The Prophet (pbuh) turned back and smiled, then ordered some money to be given to him."[2]

I wonder, Father Stephano said, if Muhammad had retaliated with a similar rough and crude behaviour, wouldn't that have deterred such a bedouin and taught him to behave and give up such rough and coarse manners?

And what would become of all those 'Quranic verses calling upon the Prophet (pbuh) and on all Muslims to overlook, forgive and forget the offenses and mistakes of others? One such 'Quranic verse says: "Bear with them (Muhammad), overlook their errors and pardon them, for God loves the kindly and the benevolent."[3]

Another verse says: "And if you pardon, forgive and forget (other people's offenses), then God is always the All Forgiving and Most Merciful."[4]

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 3296; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4294.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5362; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1749.
(3) Al-Ma'ida: 13.
(4) Al-Taghabon: 14.

A third venerable verse says: "Let them forgive and show benevolence. Wouldn't you like God to forgive you and God is the All Forgiving and Most Merciful"?[1]

Yet another 'Quranic verse says: "The Hour [Day of Judgment] is surely at hand. So forgive, Muhammad, and show gracious mercy and clemency."[2]

Had he reciprocated with a similar coarse and crude behaviour, the Prophet (pbuh) wouldn't have been merciful, and you wouldn't have seen any Muslim on the face of the earth today.

How come, he said?

That's what the 'Quranic verse says, directly addressing the Prophet (pbuh): "It was God's mercy (Grace) that you were lenient with them, for had you been harsh and hardhearted they would have broken away from you."[3] Islam itself, that is, would have come to an end at its very moment of inception. For Islam cannot be spread among people except by the better ways and means, as we have already said, by the good word and the merciful act.

You are absolutely right, he said.

Kinds of Mercy in the School of Muhammad (pbuh)

Fine, Father Stephano added, what you've told me about the merciful society Muhammad built- and built well- is quite sufficient, I think. Could we move now to the specific kind of mercy Muhammad addressed to certain segments in this society? What is it and how did Muhammad teach it in his school?

There are different types of mercy in this category, I said.

Tell me about them one by one, he said.

With pleasure.

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(1) Al-Nur: 22.
(2) Al-Hijre: 85.
(3) A'l-'Imran: 159.

1. His Mercy in Dealing with People

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to be merciful in dealing with one another, I said. Now if one looks carefully at the ways in which people deal with one another, one soon realizes that economic behaviour in general is the basis for the most dominant forms of human interaction, diverse and multifarious though they are. That is why Islam paid special attention to them, taking into account two fundamental aspects of mercy- magnanimity and justice.

Magnanimous behaviour in Islam is demanded whether the person is well off or not. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) told the people around him: "Do you know who the bankrupt is? He who has no money or possessions, they said. The bankrupt among my people, the Prophet said, is rather he who comes on the Day of Judgment with plenty of praying, fasting and *zakat*[*] but having cursed this person, falsely accused that, swindled a third, shed the blood of a fourth or beaten up a fifth man. This, that and the other injured parties are compensated for the offenses done to them by being given some of his good deeds, and if his good deeds run out before he pays them back in full, he takes on some of their bad deeds, which are hurled at him then he himself is thrown in hell."[(1)]

Thus is the punishment of the person who fails to be magnanimous, who does not deal with others in a merciful and compassionate way, who indeed converted to Islam only in name. As for the other person who shows mercy in dealing with others, he deserves God's own mercy and grace. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "God blessed the magnanimous man who is lenient in buying, selling and asking his money back."[(2)]

Did Muhammad set himself as an example in this too, Father Stephano asked?

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[*] "*Zakat*" is Charity Tax on money and possessions all Muslims are obliged to pay to the needy and less well off in the community.

[(1)] *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4678.

[(2)] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1934.

Yes, I said. It was reported that the Prophet owed a man a camel of a certain age and the man came to the Prophet and demanded a camel in return. The Prophet told his companions to give him a camel but they said they could not find one of the same age. Only an older camel was available, and the Prophet ordered to give it to him. The man showed magnanimity and didn't mind the age difference. You have paid me back in full, the man said, may God likewise repay you in full. The Godsend Prophet said: "The best of you is he who pays back his debts in the best and fairest manner."(1)

One day the Prophet was in the mosque when a Muslim who owed him came up to him asking to be repaid. The Prophet told him to "pray two *Rakat*" and when he finished the Prophet paid him back in full and gave him some extra. (2)

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2218.

(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2219. Al-'Kas'talani reports in his *Al-Mawaheb Al-Laduniah*: "Al-'Tabarani, Ibn 'Haban and Al-Baiha'ki reported that Zaid bin S'unah (one of the most eminent rabbis in Al-Madenah who later converted to Islam) said: I have detected all signs of prophethood in Muhammad's face when I first looked at him. Only two characteristic features I could not register at first sight- that his prudence and forbearance overweigh his anger and that he is more prudent and patient when other people are most irritating and abusive. I used to ingratiate myself to the Prophet so as to get to know and experience his prudence and forbearance. I sold him dates on credit and two, three days before the debt was due, I went to him, gave him such a ferocious look and held him by the collar of his dress then said: aren't you going to pay me back my due, Muhammad? By God, you Abd Al-Mu'taleb people are stalling, cheating people. Enemy of God, Omar (Ibn Al-Khatab) said. How dare you say to the Prophet of God what I hear you say! By God, had it not been for fear of being rash, I would have chopped off your head with my own sword. The Prophet kept looking at Omar, absolutely still and silent then smiled and said: he and I needed something other than this from you, Omar. You ought to have asked me to pay back what I owe in full, and you ought to have ordered him to ask for his money back in a kind and gentle manner. Go, Omar, take him and pay him back his due in full and give twenty extra measures for terrifying him, and Omar did. (In Abi Nai'em Al-Asfahani's version, reported in *Dala'il Al-Nubuwah*, cit. p. 93, Zaid said: Omar took me and paid me back in full then added twenty more measures of dates. What's this extra for, I asked? The Prophet ordered me to give it to you because I scared you, Omar said. Do you know me, Omar, I asked? No, he said, who are you? I am Zaid bin Su'nah, I said. The rabbi, he asked? The rabbi, I said. What made you say and do such horrible things to the Godsend Prophet, then?) Omar, I said, I have come to recognize and acknowledge all sings of prophethood in the face of the Prophet when I first saw him, except two things I couldn't have experienced at first hand- that his prudence and forbearance outweigh his anger, and that he is more prudent and forbearing when people are more

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people magnanimity and mercy in dealing with one another also by giving them anecdotal examples. It was reported that he once said: "There was a merchant who used to give credit to people, and whenever he found a debtor of his hard up or in a tight financial situation, he would tell his employees to remit his debts in the hope that God would forgive him and similarly rescind his sins, and so God did," the Prophet added.(1)

He used to say: "Whoever gave respite to an insolvent, he is given a good deed for everyday prior to the time the payment is due. When the payment is due and he still gave the insolvent respite, the good deed he is given is doubled for every subsequent day."(2)

Abdullah bin Abi 'Qutadah reported that his father, "Abu 'Qutadah demanded (repayment) from his debtor but the man made himself scarce. Later he got hold of him and the man said: I am hard up. Abu 'Qutadah said: (Do you swear) By God? I swear by God, he said. Well, Abu 'Qutadah said, I heard the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) say: He who loves God to spare him the torments of the Day of Resurrection should give respite to the insolvent or remit (his debt) altogether." (3)

All this, mind you, I added, is in strict accordance with the 'Quranic verse: "And if the debtor is in a tight financial situation,

abusive and annoying. And I have already experienced both and I charge you to witness that I have accepted God as the One Lord, accepted Islam as my faith and religion, and accepted Muhammad as the Prophet of God." (Al-Maktab Al-Islami edn., Vol. ii, p. 333.) In Abi Nai'em version, p. 93: "I charge you to bear witness that I give part of my wealth- and I am quite well off- as charity to Muhammad's people. Or to some of them, Omar corrected me, for you do not have enough for them all. Or to some of them, I said agreeing with him. Zaid and Omar went back to the Prophet of God (pbuh) and Zaid said: I attest that God is One and that Muhammad is His Prophet. Zaid remained a true believer in Islam, took part in many battles with the Prophet and died a martyr in Tabuk Conquest. See the editing of this Hadeeth in Dr Mahdi Ruz'kallah Ahmad, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah fi Dhaw' Al-Mas'ader Al-A'sliah*, 1992, p. 143, footnote 222.)

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1936.

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 86.

(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2923.

then give him respite till things ease up. To remit the debt altogether as a charitable act of alms giving would be even better."[1]

How marvelous it would be for the entire corpus of human interaction to be based on mercy and magnanimity, Father Stephano said. Life for us in the west has become positively intolerable with all those heavy-handed human laws legislating for people's dealings with one another. No one can see a way out and we seem to be incapable of ridding ourselves of them.

But the way is quite clear really, I said. When there's a will there is a way, you know.

How, he asked?

Well, simply by going back to God Almighty. Indeed, when we go back to Him we will return to God's way of dealing with His people.

And what is God's way of dealing with His people?

Mercy, I said.

Could you be a bit more explicit?

It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: God preordained the good and the bad deeds and He showed the way to do them. If someone intended to do a good deed and he did not do it, God would count it a full good deed for him. If he intended to do and actually went ahead and did it, then God would count it for him between ten to seven hundred good deeds, and would even double it many more times. If somebody however intended to do a bad deed and did not do it, God would count it as a full good deed. If the man intended to do and actually did do a bad deed, then God would count it only as one bad deed."[2] Is there anything other than magnanimity and mercy in this kind of dealing?

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(1) Al-Ba'karah: 280.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 6010.

The very soul of mercy in fact, he said.

The 'Quranic verse says: "Who is it that would advance God a goodly loan, which He would amply repay with manifold increase."(1)

What a school Muhammad established, Father Stephano said admiringly! Had the west known what was really in it, it would never have abandoned it for any other.

And do you know the primary text around which the mercy in dealing with people revolves in the school of Muhammad?

What?

The venerable Quranic verse that says: "And eat up not your wealth in vanity amongst yourselves."(2)

After a moment's reflection Father Stephano said: If this specific verse was put to practice in any human society, all evils would have vanished and all mercies would have descended from on high.

All courts of law would have closed their doors, too, I added.

Right you are, he said.

In the school of Muhammad (pbuh) people learn that one of the most detrimental aspects of the vain eating up of wealth is usury. Out of sheer mercy and pity for human beings, and lest they'd fall in the hands usurers, sucking the blood of the needy, some venerable 'Quranic verses and Hadeeths banned all forms of usury and strictly prohibited them. The Companion of the Prophet Jaber bin Abdullah reported that the Prophet said: "Cursed are the usurer, the usuree, the registrar of the usurious transaction and the two witnesses to it. They are equally guilty."(3)

This was based on the 'Quranic verse which categorically states: "Those who eat up usury money will not stand (on the

(1) Al-Ba'karah: 245.
(2) Al-Ba'karah: 188.
(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2995- agreed on.

Day of Resurrection) except like the person touched by Satan and led to confusion and insanity. That is because they say: Trading is just like usury, whereas God has permitted trading and forbidden usury. So whoever receives an admonition from his Lord (and stops dealing with usury) shall not be punished and can keep his past earnings; his case is up to God to judge; but whoever returns (to dealing with usury), he is one of the dwellers of Hell who will abide there for good."[(1)]

And the 'Quranic verse also states: "God wipes up usurious returns and multiplies the proceedings of charity and alms giving."[(2)]

The 'Quranic verse also states: "You who believe in God, do not deal with usury."[(3)]

And why do you consider banning usury in the school of Muhammad an aspect of tolerance and mercy for human beings, Father Stephano asked?

Because of the inherent harshness and brutality in the act of usurious dealing, I said. The borrower would not have borrowed the money had he not been in dire need. He would always be in a weak position, while the usurer would always have the upper hand and would always be in a position to dictate his terms and conditions on the borrower.

True, he said. Mercy I suppose is also giving a helping hand to the weaker element in facing the stronger. Still, what is the alternative to usury in the school of Muhammad?

The goodly loan, I said, in which the lender gets back the capital he had given to the borrower.

The venerable verse says: "You who believed (in Islam), obey God and give up what remains outstanding (to you) from *Ribâ* (usury), if you are (true) believers. If you do not, then take heed of a war declared against you by God and His Messenger. If you

(1) Al-Ba'karah: 275.
(2) Al-Ba'karah: 276
(3) A'l-'Imran: 130.

relent and repent, you shall have your capital back in a fair deal whereby you are neither oppressed nor oppressors."[(1)]

But what about the wages of the lender here?

The lender in the school of Muhammad (pbuh) does not expect to have his wages from the borrower but from God Almighty. God rewards him for the merciful and good deed he had done in saving his brother from the tight situation he is in.

By God, he said, western civilization has not known such magnanimity and social solidarity yet!

This is regarding magnanimity. As for fairness and justice, they are also targeted and called for in the school of Muhammad in all situations and in all forms of human interaction- including the way the husband deals with his wives, the father with his children, man with woman, the rich with the poor, the common people with their emir and ruler, etc. All people are on equal footing before the justice of the school of Muhammad (pbuh) and examples of this are so numerous and varied that even western scholars testified to their validity.

Which western scholars, he asked?

The American orientalist Sinchs for instance, says: "Muhammad was the first to have instituted equality and justice among Muslims."[(2)]

And what evidence does Sinchs furnish for this?

Great many original texts. I'll mention only a few 'Quranic verses teaching people fairness and justice:

-Directly addressing the Godsend Prophet (pbuh), the 'Quranic verse instructs him to: "Say: I believe in all Scripture(s) God had sent down (to people), and was commanded to be fair and just in dealing with you."[(3)]

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(1) Al-Ba'karah: 278-9.
(2) Quoted in Muhammad Fahmi Abdul Wahab, *Muhammad fi Nathar Al-Gharb,* p. 42.
(3) Al-Shurah: 15

-And the 'Quranic verse enforcing the need for the husband to be just and fair in dealing with his wives says: "And if you fear that you cannot do justice (to many) then marry (only) one (wife)."[1]

-And the 'Quranic verse enforcing the need for justice in adjudicating between people says: "God commands that you render back to their rightful owners all you had been entrusted with; and when you adjudicate between people that you judge with justice."[2]

This verse in fact contains another aspect of mercy in dealing with people, Father Stephano hastened to say.

What, I asked?

Giving back to their rightful owners everything you are entrusted with.

You're absolutely right, I said.

And, I added, the 'Quranic verse enforcing the need for fairness in judging even the closest of kith and kin says: "(In all your dealings) Give full measure and full weight in justice. We task not any soul beyond its scope (and means). And when you say (something) be fair, even though it be (against) a relative."[3]

In this verse, too, Father Stephano interjected, there is another aspect of mercy in dealing with people.

What?

"Give full measure and full weight in justice," he said. But what exactly is meant here?

The intention is to teach people honest dealing and not to cheat in measures, weights and standards.

How beautiful all this is, but it suffices, he said.

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(1) Al-Nisa': 3.
(2) Al-Nisa': 58.
(3) Al-An'am: 152.

I'll round up with one final example. Just in case there is some kind of enmity between one person and another, and one's self starts talking him into not applying justice and giving the other his due fair and square, the 'Quranic verse came down to categorically state: "You who believe! Stand out firm for God as just witnesses; let not the enmity and hatred of others make you biased and unfair. Be just: that is nearer to piety; and fear God. God indeed is well-acquainted with what you do."(1)

I'm well and truly puzzled at the school of Muhammad! Even the enemies had their share of justice in it!(2)

2. His Mercy in Acts of Worship

What else did Muhammad teach in his school other than this kind of mercy, Father Stephano asked?

The Godsend Prophet (pbuh) taught mercy in all forms of worship, I said.

And is there mercy and harshness in acts of worship?

Yes, I said. Many people think that being hard on themselves, that tiring their bodies out with acts of worship and with excessive renunciation of life and its pleasures, are somehow something that pleases God. The truth the school of Muhammad taught says otherwise.

What does it say exactly?

It says the Prophet (pbuh) was more merciful with the faithful than they were with themselves.

How come?

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(1) Al-Ma'ida: 8.

(2) The Christian author Shibly Al-Ma'la't wrote: "Of all religious canons, the 'Quranic *Sharia*' is the only socially practical and complete corpus of laws that seeks to achieve real, earthly objectives. It did not include only generic rules and wholistic principles common to all religions; it also paid meticulous attention to the rules and regulations pertaining to everyday life. The Islamic Sharia' enacts statutory laws covering all aspects of human behaviour and human interactions, even obligatory acts of worship. It is as such a material, substantive *Sharia'*." (*Al-Mu'kta'taf*: Jan. 1910.)

Three people went round the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) asking his wives about his usual acts of worship. When they were told about them, it was as if they made light of them. Well, they said to themselves, he is the Prophet after all. God had forgiven his past and future sins. We cannot compare with him. I myself, said one, pray the whole night over; I fast for ever, said the other, never breaking my fasting; and I abstain, said the third, never marrying or approaching women. The Prophet (pbuh) came to see them and asked: "Are you the ones who said so and so? By God, I am the most God fearing amongst you and by far the most pious, but I fast and eat, pray and sleep, and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my *sunnah* (tradition) is none of me (not one of my follower)."(1)

Abdullah bin Amru bin Al-As' reported that "The Prophet (pbuh) told me: Abdullah, didn't I tell you to pray all night and fast the whole day? I said, yes, Godsend Prophet, you did. He said do not do so but pray and also sleep at night, fast and break your fasting during the day. Your body has a right on you, your eyes have a right on you, your wife has a right on you, and your guest has a right on you. Suffice it that you fast three days a month and your reward for every good deed is multiplied ten times. That means it is as if you have fasted the whole time over. I insisted (on fasting more) and he asserted his prohibition. I said I have the strength to do it, and the Prophet said: fast the way the Prophet David (pbuh) used to fast and not more, then. And how did the prophet David fast, I asked? The Prophet said half of eternity- every other day, that is. If only I took up the advice and the license the Prophet gave me, Abdullah said when he grew older."(2)

'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet (pbuh), reported that "a woman from (the tribe) Bani Asad was sitting with me and the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) came in and asked who this woman is? So and so, I said, a pious woman who stays up all the night

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5063; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 782.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1839; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1973.

praying and I mentioned some of what she says in her prayers. 'Muh,' the Prophet murmured then said: Do only what is within your power. God never grows weary but you do. The act of worship most pleasing to God is that which the doer does consistently."(1)

It is also reported that the Godsend Prophet went out of his house in the middle of the night and prayed (*Qiyam Al-Lail*) in the mosque and some men prayed behind him. In the morning, the people spoke about it and a larger number gathered and prayed behind him the following night. The next morning the people again talked about it and on the third night the mosque was filled with still a larger congregation. The Godsend Prophet came to the mosque and the people prayed behind him. On the fourth night the Mosque was crowded with people and could not accommodate them all. The Prophet however came out only for the morning prayer (*Salat Al-Sub'h*, i.e. he did not go out for the mid-night prayer), and when it was over, he recited *Al-Tashahud* and addressed the people saying: Well, I was not unaware of your presence but I was afraid it (the mid-night prayer) would be enjoined on you and you might not be up to it."(2)

It is further reported that he entered the Mosque once and saw a rope hanging in between its two pillars. "What is this rope for?' he asked and the people said: This rope is for Zainab.(3) When she is tired praying, she holds on to it. No, the Prophet said. Untie the rope. Don't use it. You should pray as long as you can. When you get tired sit down (and rest)."(4)

The Godsend Prophet (pbuh) even forbade the Imam to prolong his prayer, showing mercy to the people praying behind him. It is reported by Ibn Massoud that "A man said: Godsend Prophet, I keep away from the morning prayer because the so-and-so Imam prolongs it so much when he leads us. The Prophet

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1083.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 872.
(3) In *Sahih Muslim*, "Zainab bint Jahsh, who held on to the rope when she got tired."
(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 872; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1117.

(pbuh) was very angry; in fact I have never seen him more angry. He said: You people! Some of you do really put others off. Whoever leads in prayer let him make it brief, because some of the people behind him might be sick, weak or busy."[1]

It is reported that he said: "When I begin the prayer I would like to prolong it so, but when I hear a baby crying I cut it short, knowing the sheer anguish of his mother."[2]

He did not accept prolonging the prayer even for the single individual praying on his own, in line with the general Islamic principle of making things easy for people and showing mercy to them. He heard that a man prolongs his prostration in prayer and the Prophet came to him and held him by the shoulders. "God accepted for this nation the easy way out and hated the hard- and he repeated it three times. What you are doing is the exact opposite, taking up the hard way and leaving out the easy."[3]

Since praying is a fundamental tenet of Islam, repeated five times a day, it might be a shade hard for people to do it in one specific place. That is why the teachings of the school of Muhammad showed mercy to people even in this, telling them they could pray anywhere they happened to be, provided the place is clean. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "The whole earth has been turned into a mosque for me to conduct my prayer, ablutions and *tayammum*. Anyone of my followers therefore can pray anywhere when the time of prayer is due."[4]

He (pbuh) showed mercy to people even in the simplest and easiest acts of worship. He said: "Had it not been hard on the believers, I would have instructed them to clean their teeth with *al-siwak* at every prayer."[5] Now you tell me, really, is cleaning one's teeth with *al-siwak* such an arduous task?!

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 663. Al-Albani in *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh* said it is "agreed on."
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 668; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 723.
(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 1635.
(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 323.
(5) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 370.

Lucky you, followers of Muhammad, Father Stephano said. Please tell me more about this aspect of mercy.

His mercy (pbuh) did not only include the set acts of worship themselves but extended to the merciful ways and means he used to teach them to people.

How, Father Stephano asked?

I said: Al-Hakam Al-Sulami reported that he was "praying with the Prophet (pbuh) when a man in the congregation sneezed. Bless you, I said. The people gave me such disapproving looks. Blimey! I said: What are you looking at me like that for? Impatiently they started slapping at their thighs with their hands, giving me all kinds of gestures to be quiet. So I shut up. When the Prophet finished the prayer- and for the life of me, by God and by my own mother and father, never have I seen a better teacher before or after him- he did not revile me or curse me or hit me. He only said: No common talk is allowed in prayer; only praising the Lord, paying tribute to His Oneness and Greatness, and only reading Al-Quran are allowed."(1)

Anas bin Malek also said: "While we were sitting with the Prophet (pbuh) in the Mosque, a bedouin came in and started urinating. The Prophet's companions shouted at him but the Prophet (pbuh) said: Leave off, don't interrupt him. So they let him finish peeing in the Mosque. The Prophet (pbuh) then summoned the man and told him: Mosques are no places for urination or excrement; they are places to praise the Almighty God, pray and read Al-Quran. He then ordered a man to bring a bucketful of water and he washed the soiled spot."(2)

These are some aspects of his mercy for people in relation to praying as an act of worship. His mercy for people in so far as fasting is concerned is equally manifest. The Prophet (pbuh) did not approve of travelers fasting because of the hardship entailed,

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 836.

(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 429. In Al-Albani's version reported in *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2673, "He said: You were sent prophets who make things easy for you not hard."

for even a hundred years ago towards the beginning of the twentieth century, traveling was still arduous. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) was travelling once and he came across a crowd of people surrounding a man sat in shade. What is going on, he asked? A fasting man fainted, they said. Well, it is no piety to fast while travelling, the Prophet said."[1]

In the year of the Conquest, the Prophet went out to Makkah in Ramadan and fasted till he reached a place called Kara' Al-Ghanam, a valley between Makkah and Al-Madinah. The people with him fasted too, but he was told they found it hard and were waiting to see what he would do. In the afternoon, he asked for a glass of water and held it up for all to see then drank it. He was told afterwards that some people with him still fasted on, and he said: "These are the disobedient lot, the disobedient lot."[2]

It was also reported that he (pbuh) felt so sorry for his companions that restrained them from continuing their fasting. But you yourself fast on, they said. I am not like you, he said. My God provides me with food and water."[3]

Abu Hurairah reported: "While we were sitting with the Prophet a man came to him and said: Godsend Prophet! I'm utterly ruined. The Prophet asked what was the matter with him, and the man said that his wife made him have sex with her while fasting. The Prophet asked him: Can you afford to set a slave free? No, the man said. Can you fast for two successive months? No, the man said. Can you afford to feed sixty poor people? No, the man said. The Prophet kept silent and while we kept silent with him, a big basketful of dates was offered to the Prophet. Where is the inquirer, the Prophet asked? Here I am, the man said. Take this (the basket of dates) and give it in charity, the Prophet said. Should I give it to a person poorer than me, the man asked, and by God, there is no family between the two mountains (of Al-Madina) poorer than my family, he added? Feed

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1810; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1879.
(2) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1878.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1830; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1850.

your family with it then, the Prophet said, smiling till his eye teeth became visible."[1]

Father Stephano too laughed at what the Arab man said. How relaxed and easy going your religion is, he added!

As for the Hajj, his mercy was manifest in that the Prophet (pbuh) did not approve of his people conducting this act of worship unless they had sufficient physical and spiritual means, in line with the 'Quranic verse that instituted Hajj as a basic Islamic tenet: "And pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God owed by every person who can afford it."[2]

Many people liked to burden themselves unnecessarily with conducting this act of worship and the Prophet, as always, was more merciful with them than they were with themselves. It is reported that the Prophet saw an old man walking, supported by his two sons. He asked about him and the people informed him that he had vowed to go on foot to God's House (Al-Ka'ba). He said, God is not in need of this old man torturing himself, and he ordered him to ride."[3]

'Ukbah bin Amer reported: "My sister vowed to go on foot to the Ka'ba, and she wanted me to ask the opinion of the Prophet, and so I did. Let her both walk and ride, the Prophet said."[4]

The Prophet (pbuh) summed up his teaching people mercy in acts of worship by saying: "Religion is accessible and easy. He is bound to be crushed who encumbers himself with excessive religious duties. So do not go to extremes. Aim at perfection but do what you can to approach the ideal. Look forward to receiving the good tidings that you will be rewarded. Gain strength by worshipping in the morning, the evening and part of the night."[5]

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1800.
(2) A'l- 'Imran: 97.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1732; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3100. See also Al-Albani's *Mishkat Al-Masabeih*, where the phrase "God's House" is added.
(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*: 1733; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3102.
(5) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 38.

All this ease and mercy shown in performing acts of worship are attributable to the venerable 'Quranic verse which says: "God desires what is easy for you, not what is hard and difficult."[1] Similarly, another 'Quranic verse states: "And We shall steer you down the easy way."[2]

How wonderful it is for man not to overreach and overburden himself with what is beyond his powers; not to overdo his acts of worship and forget his allotted share of life in this world, Father Stephano said. How wonderful it is that worship is not a form of monasticism and self-immolation but an actual sharing in the perpetuation of life on this earth. How wonderful is Muhammad's *sunnah* of worship!

3. His Mercy with the Elderly

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to elderly men and women, I said, and mercy here means respecting and honouring them. In fact the Prophet went so far in this as to put honouring the elderly on a par with revering and venerating Almighty God. "It is part of glorifying God," he said, "to honour the grey-haired, elderly Muslims."[3] Now, what mercy is there beyond this?!

One aspect of his showing mercy and respect to the elderly is the preferential treatment he accorded to them, even in the right of speech. It is reported that a group of people came to him and the youngest started talking, but the Prophet (pbuh) said: "The older should begin."[4]

In many other matters, like leading the prayers, the Prophet gave preferential treatment to the elderly when qualifications were

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[1] Al-Ba'karah: 185.
[2] Al-A'la: 8.
[3] Al-Albani's *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 4972. He labeled it "good" as he did in *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 98, and so did Al-Iraqi in *Takhreej Ahadeeth Al-I'hia'*.
[4] *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3158.

equal. It is reported that two men who wanted to travel came to him. He told them: "When you two leave, you should pronounce the *Athan*, then the *Iqama* whenever prayer time is due, and the older of you should lead in prayer."(1)

The same goes for smaller matters too. It is reported that he said: "I saw in a vision I was rinsing my mouth with *siwak*. Two people came up to me, one older than the other. I handed the younger the *siwak* but I was told to give it to the older first, and so I did."(2)

It is also reported that the Prophet was given a drink with a boy seated to his right and the older people to his left. "Would you permit me to pass (the drink) to the elder people (first)," the Prophet asked? The boy said, "I wouldn't wish anyone to have my share other than you. So, the Prophet (pbuh) gave it to the boy."(3)

He coupled respecting the old with being kind to the young, for one cannot be a Muslim if one ignores either mercy: "None of us is he who does not show mercy to the young and revere the old."(4)

4. His Mercy with Fathers and Mothers

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

He taught people in his school to show mercy to fathers and mothers and called it *Bir Al-Walidain* (filial piety). Conversely, he constantly warned against being cruel to them and called it *'Uk'uk' A-Walidain* (filial impiety).

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 594; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1081.

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 238; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4216. In *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha*, Hadeeth no. 1555, Al-Albani said: "Ibn Ba'tal reported that it (the Hadeeth) signifies giving preference to the old in giving the *siwak*, which also applies to eating, drinking, walking and speaking. Al-Muhalab said: (This holds true) provided the people were not seated in the usual orderly manner. If they were, it is *sunnah* to give preference to the person on the right, which is correct."

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5189.

(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2196.

As for the former, the Prophet (pbuh) did not allow Muslims even to fulfill some of their basic religious duties without their parents' blessings and approval. It is reported that a man emigrated from Yemen to join in the jihad, but the Prophet asked him: "Did you leave anyone behind in Yemen? My parents, the man said. Did they give you permission to leave, the Prophet asked? No, the man said. Then go back and ask their permission. If they agree come and take part in jihad; if they don't stay with them and show them filial piety, the Prophet said."(1)

Another man came to the Prophet and said: "I came to pledge my loyalty and willingness to emigrate with you (To Al-Madinah) and I left behind my parents weeping. Go back and make them laugh the way you had made them weep, the Prophet said."(2)

He preferred for Muslims filial piety over taking part in the jihad in God's Cause, even with parental permission. A man once asked him: "Should I take part in jihad? Are your parents still around, the Prophet asked? Yes, he said. Then take part in the jihad in their cause, the Prophet answered."(3)

Another Muslim came to him and said: "I'd like to participate in jihad and I want your advice. Is you mother alive, the Prophet asked? Yes, the man said. Stay with her, then (honour her in another version of the Hadeeth), for Paradise is under her feet, the Prophet said."(4)

When he talked about filial piety, the Prophet (pbuh) often included both parents. Other times he was more specific. A bedouin once came to him and asked: "Who should I be most dutiful to? You mother, said the Prophet. Then who, asked the

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(1) Al- Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Sunnan Abi Dawood,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 2530. He said it is "authentic".

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 2481.

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5515.

(4) Al-Naisaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala Al-Sahihain,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 7248-2502. He said it is "authentic".

man. Your mother, said the Prophet. Then who, asked the man? Your father, said the Prophet."[1]

One of the Prophet's Companions, called Haritha bin Al-N'uman, was most dutiful to his mother. "I entered Paradise," the Prophet said, "and I heard someone reading. Who_is that, I asked and they told me: Haritha bin Al-N'uman. This is where filial piety leads you, this is where filial piety leads you."[2]

Jaber bin Abdullah reported that a man said: "Godsend Prophet, I have some money stashed away and I have a son. My father wants to lay his hands on my money. You and your money belong to your father, the Prophet said.[3]

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: "The parent is the middle (the most accessible) gateway to Paradise"[4]- and the parent here means mother, father and/or both.

I suppose this mercy shown to parents, which the School of Muhammad heeded and preached, is exclusive to Muslim parents, isn't it, Father Stephano asked?

By no means, I said. To non-Muslims too. It is reported that Asma bint Abi Bakr said: My mother came to me asking a favour, and she was a polytheist unbeliever, standing on the side of 'Quraish in the Covenant the Prophet had made with them (Abu Bakr had divorced Asma's mother, 'Katila, in the pre-Islamic era). So I consulted the Prophet (pbuh) and asked his opinion. Should I be kind to my mother, and the Prophet said: "yes, be kind to your mother."[5]

The Prophet however did not stress the need for filial fidelity towards parents alone but included the brothers and sisters. He

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(1) Al-Albani, *Mukhtasar Irwa' Sal-Ghaleel*. He said it is "authentic."

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 914.

(3) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Sunnan Ibn Majah,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 2291. He said it is "authentic."

(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Sisilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 914. *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5521; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth 1671 (Muslim's wording).

(5) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5521; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth 1671 (Muslim's wording).

said: "Whoever wishes to show filial piety to his father in his grave, let him be kind to his brothers and sisters."[1]

What about ingratitude and filial impiety, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school that filial ingratitude is one the biggest sins in Islam. A companion of his reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Shall I tell you what the deadliest sins in Islam are? Yes, Godsend Prophet, they said. They are to join partners in worship with God, and filial impiety, he said."[2]

Filial impiety on a par with polytheism, Father Stephano wondered?! This is the soul of mercy indeed!

In another Hadeeth, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Good tidings, good tidings to you all. He who prays the prescribed five times and avoids the grave sins can enter Paradise from whichever gateway he likes. The grave sins are: filial impiety, joining partners unto God, murder, false accusation of chaste women, stealing the money and possessions of orphans, dodging jihad and running away from battle, and usurious dealings."[3]

In another Hadeeth he said: "Three people God would not even look at on the Day of Resurrection: a son undutiful to his parents, the alcoholic, and the one who keeps reminding others of his favours and brags about them. Three others are not admitted to Heaven- the ungrateful son who wrongs his parents, the cuckold and the man-ish woman."[4]

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 1432. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5519. The Hadeeth ends with "He [the Prophet (pbuh)] was leaning and he sat up and added- and giving false testimony, and giving false testimony, and he kept repeating it till I thought he would not cease."

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5519. The Hadeeth ends with "He [the Prophet (pbuh)] was leaning and he sat up and said- and giving false testimony, and giving false testimony, and he kept repeating it till I thought he would not cease. "Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 3451.

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 3451.

(4) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2511. He said it is "good and authentic."

He even made it a deadly sin that a son causes harm to his parents. He said: "One of the grave sins is for a man to curse his parents. But how can a man curse his own parent, Godsend Prophet, they asked? Well, he curses some man's father and the man curses his father back, or curses his mother and the man curses his mother in return."[1]

That's why the Prophet (pbuh) put so much emphasis on mercy and filial piety, for their punishment is meted out in this life, not postponed to the afterlife. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The punishment of two sins is speeded up and dealt out in this life: prostitution and filial impiety."[2]

Having said all that it seems to me, Father Stephano said after a moment's reflection, God's approval or disapproval of a person hinges on the parents' approval or disapproval of him.

You're absolutely right, I said. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "God's contentment lies in the contentment of parents; His discontentment, conversely, lies in the discontentment of parents."[3]

Do all these Hadeeths about mercy and filial piety originate in the 'Quran, Father Stephano asked?

Yes, I said. The 'Quranic verse states: "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you show kindness to parents. If one or both of them reached old age with you (under your care), never say "Fie" ("Ugh" or any word of contempt) to them, never scold them but always speak kindly to them. And spread over to them the wing of mercy and humility and say, Lord, have mercy on them both as they had nurtured me when little."[4]

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2514. He labeled it "authentic."

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 137. He said it is "authentic."

(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 5820. He labeled it "authentic."

(4) Al-Isra': 23-4.

Another 'Quranic verse says: "Come, I shall read you what your Lord has forbidden you: You ascribe no partner unto Him, and you be good to (your) parents."[1]

And the 'Quranic verse says: "We have urged upon man kindness to his parents. In strain upon strain did his mother bear him; two (whole) years his weaning. So give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the ultimate end (of all journeying)."[2]

And the 'Quranic verse says: "We have urged upon man kindness to his parents."[3]

How totally different attitudes Muhammad's school and modern western thinking hold toward parents, Father Stephano said after another moment's reflection!

How different, I asked?

Having relinquished the healthy family system, the western school has turned parents into a burden of which children try to rid themselves as hard and fast as they can, especially when the parents advance in years.

But people in the west found homes for the elderly to solve this problem, and we have started to imitate them.

Do you think that an employee or a worker cares for the well being of a factory as much as its rightful owner does, he asked?

No, I said.

Add to this, he said, that the old man and woman wouldn't feel so utterly decrepit if they go on living in their own house and amid their own relatives. Their inner, psychological pains intensify when they are moved into a strange home, where they really feel the ingratitude of their children.

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(1) Al-An'am: 151.
(2) Lu'kman: 14.
(3) Al-'Ankabout: 8.

5. His Mercy with Children

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Godsend Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to babies, children and young kids.* Anas bin Malek, a companion of the Prophet and the attendant who remained with him most of the time said: "I have never seen anyone more kind to his children than God's Messenger (pbuh). Ibrahim (the Prophet's son) was sent to Awali Al-Madina (a suburb of the city) for suckling. The Prophet (pbuh) used to go there and we accompanied him. He would enter the house, and it was always filled with smoke because the foster-father of his child was a blacksmith. He would take his son (Ibrahim), kiss him then go all the way back."(1)

The Prophet (pbuh) could tell how merciful people are by their love of their children. His wife 'A'isha reported that "a few bedouins came to God's Messenger (pbuh) and said: Do you kiss your children? He said: Yes. They said: By God we do not kiss our kids. And what can I do for you, the Prophet said, if God deprived you of mercy?" (In another version "took mercy out of your hearts.")(2)

Abu Hurairah reported that "Al-Aqra' bin Habes saw God's Prophet (pbuh) kissing Al-Hassan (bin Ali). He said: I have ten children and I have never kissed any one of them. The Prophet said: He who does not show mercy is shown no mercy (in return)".(3)

God's Messenger (pbuh) used to play and jest with children. It is reported that "He used to put his tongue out to Al-Hassan (bin

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* Fifteen years old or less. See *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3473.
(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeths no. 4279-4280.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 4281.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 4282.

Ali) and seeing the red colour of his tongue the boy would giggle and rush to him."[1]

It is reported too that he used to play with Zainab bint Um Salamah, the daughter of his wife by a former marriage, "repeatedly calling her Zuwainab (little Zainab), Zuwainab."[2]

His companion and attendant Anas bin Malek reported that "God's Messenger used to come in to our house and I had a little brother nicknamed Abu 'Umair. He had a little canary bird he played with and the bird died. The Prophet came in and found the boy inconsolable. What is wrong with him, he asked, and they told his bird died. The Prophet said to the boy in a rhyming couplet: 'Oh what did the canary dear/Do to Abu 'Umair?"[3]

The Prophet (pbuh) did not deprive children of his mercy and compassion even at prayer. It is reported that "he was praying and when he prostrated himself Al-Hassan and Al-Husain jumped on his back. The people wanted to prevent them, but the Prophet signaled to leave them be. When he finished praying he put them on his lap and said: whoever loved me let him love those two."[4]

It is also reported that "He prayed carrying Umamat bint Zainab (his grand daughter). When he prostrated himself in prayer he used to put her down, and when he stood up he carried her again."[5]

The Prophet (pbuh) used to sit with the children near him playing, and he used to take part in their games. It is reported that "he used to line up Abdullah, 'Ubaidullah and many other children of his cousin Al-Abbas and tell them whoever reaches me first I will give him so and so. The children would then race

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 70.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2141
(3)Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Abi Dawood,* Hadeeth no. 4969. See also *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5753.
(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 312.
(5) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 486; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 844.

each other to him and fall on his chest and back and he would hold them and kiss them."[(1)]

He didn't ignore them if he happened to pass them by while they are playing. Abdullah bin Ja'far said: "When the Prophet (pbuh) used to pass by us- 'Kuthm and 'Ubaidullah, the two sons of Al-'Abbas, and myself- he would say, lift that boy for me and he would carry me in front of his riding animal. And lift that little one too, and he'd carry 'Kuthm behind him… He passed his hand three times on my head once, each time saying: please God bless and perpetuate Ja'far with his sons."[(2)]

He loved children so much he missed them when travelling, and when he returned the children eagerly received him, knowing his love for them. Abdullah bin Ja'far reported that "when God's Messenger (pbuh) came back from a trip, he was received by the children of his family who would rush to welcome him. He came back from a trip once and I was carried to him first. He held me in his arms once, then came one of Fa'tima's two sons and he mounted him behind him. The three of us were ushered to Al-Madina in this way, riding together on the same beast."[(3)]

Ibn Abbas reported that "the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) entered Makkah carrying 'Kuthm bin Al-'Abbas in his arms and Al-Fadhle (bin Al-Abbas) behind him (on his riding animal)."[(4)]

People knew well this noble and merciful behaviour and they used to bring the Prophet their children to bless them and pray God for them. His wife 'A'isha reported that "Babies were brought to the Messenger of God (pbuh) and he would bless them and rub the soft palates of the newborn with chewed sweet dates."[(5)]

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(1) *Musnad Ahmad*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 1739. It is also cited in *Mujama' Al-Zawa'id* which says: "it is reported by Ahmad and its chain of narrators is good."

(2) Reported in *Mujama' Al-Zawa'id* which says: "it is reported by Ahmad and the narrators are trustworthy."

(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4455.

(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5509.

(5) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4000.

The Prophet (pbuh) did not keep his passionate love for children to himself but encouraged others to show love and kindness to them. It is reported that he said: "whoever had three children born to him in Islam and they died before they become of age, God would let him into Heaven with their sheer mercy and grace."[(1)]

He also said: "whoever provides for two bond girls till they become of age, I will enter Heaven with him like these two, and he pointed to his index and middle fingers."[(2)]

The Prophet (pbuh) constantly urged men to provide for their families and children. He said: "the best Dinar is that which a person spends on his family."[(3)] The narrator of the Hadeeth, Abu 'Qilabah, said: "And what man is more greatly rewarded than he who spends money on youngsters, which saves them from want or with which God brings profit for them and makes them rich."[(4)]

"Of a Dinar you spend in God's cause," he added, "a Dinar you spend on freeing a slave, a Dinar you donate to the poor, and a Dinar you spend on your family, the one you are more richly rewarded for is the Dinar you spend on your family."[(5)]

One way of showing mercy to children is being fair in giving gifts to them. That is why the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Be fair in handing out gift to your children."[(6)]

Al-Nu'man bin Bashir reported: "My father gave me a present but 'Amra bint Rawaha (my mother) said that she would not agree to it unless he made God's Messenger a witness to it. So, my father went to the Prophet and said, I have given a gift to my son from 'Amra bint Rawaha, but she ordered me to make you a witness to it. The Prophet asked: Did you give (the like) to every

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Slisilah Al-Sahiha,* Hadeeth no. 2681.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1120.
(3) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1660.
(4) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1660.
(5) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1661.
(6) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 2396.

one of your sons? He said no. The Prophet said: Fear God and be just and equitable with your children. My father returned and took back his gift."[(1)]

I once read a curious statement by the American orientalist Snichs, Father Stephano said. He claimed that "Muhammad protected children and prohibited their killing in fear of destitution."[(2)] What evidence did he furnish in support of this statement? Anything in the original texts about that?

Yes, I said. His evidence is derived from verses of the venerable Quran.

-One Quranic verse says: "God urges upon you to provide for your children."[(3)]

-Another says: "Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for you and for them."[(4)]

A third 'Quranic verse says: "Don not kill your children in fear of destitution. We shall provide for them and for you."[(5)]

A fourth says: "Losers are those who besottedly have slain their children without knowledge."[(6)]

Father Stephano reflected for a moment then said: The mercy towards children Muhammad taught in his school some 1400 years ago has become today what contemporary western civilization adopts and claims as its own. With one essential difference, of course, that this civilization often deprives its children of a healthy family life, bringing them up and nurturing them on a staple diet of individualism and selfishness. Muhammad's school on the other hand had managed to furnish the proper humane environment the family provides for its members, both young and old.

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2398.

(2) Quoted by Muhammad Fahmi Abdulwahab, *Muhammad in the Eyes of Western Philosophers*, cit., p. 42.

(3) Al-Nisa': 11.

(4) Al-An'am: 151.

(5) Al-Isra': 31.

(6) Al-Ana'm: 140.

6. His Mercy with Kith and Kin

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to relatives. He called kinship and blood ties "womb relations" (*al-'ra'hem*), and showing mercy to kith and kin "joining womb relations" (*silatu al-'ra'hem*). No matter how much I tell you about maintaining good womb relations in the school of Muhammad (pbuh), I shall not be able to give it its due. I'll just say what springs to my mind, and the first thing that occurs to me on the spur of the moment is his Hadeeth about the creation of womb ties or kinship. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "God created the Creation and when He finished, *Al-Ra'hem* (i.e., the Womb/Kinship) said: Herewith I seek refuge with You, Lord, from all those who sever womb ties. God said: Yes, would it please you that I maintain good relations with the one who maintains and joins womb ties, and sever relations with the one who severs his ties with you? Yes, my Lord, she said. You got that, the Lord said."(1)

It is as if having created them and given them their name, God had preserved womb ties and put them under His own protection. The Prophet (pbuh) intimated that "God said: I, the Lord, All Compassionate and Most Merciful, created the Womb and coined her name. Whoever maintains good ties with her I maintain good relations with him; whoever severs womb ties, I sever relations with him."(2)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: Tied up to the Heavenly Throne itself, the Womb says: whoever maintains good relations with me God maintains good relations with him; whoever severs the ties with me God severs relations with him."(3)

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5528; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4634.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 520.
(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4635.

That is why, after belief in God Almighty, showing mercy to blood/womb relations is the best of deeds to bring one closer to the Lord. By the same token, after polytheism, severing womb/blood ties and being harsh to one's own kith and kin are the most loathsome of deeds that would keep one away from God. A man from a tribe called Khatha'am said: "I came up to the Prophet (pbuh) and he was among a group of his companions. I said: Are you the one who claims to be the Godsend Messenger? Yes, he said.

I said: Godsend Messenger, what deed is most loved by the Lord? Belief in God, he said.

Then what, I asked? Joining womb ties, he said.

Then what, I said? Promoting virtues and preventing vices, he said.

I said: Godsend Messenger, which are the most loathsome deeds to God?

Ascribing partners unto Him, he said.

Then what, I asked? Severing womb ties, he said.

Then what, I said? Promoting vices and preventing virtues, he said."[1]

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people that the ultimate reward in the afterlife, going to Heaven, hinges on maintaining strong ties with kith and kin (i.e. showing mercy to relatives). He said: "No severer of womb ties shall ever enter Heaven,"[2] meaning the one who treats his relatives harshly.

It is reported that a man asked him: "Tell me about a deed that lets me into Heaven. The Prophet said: You worship God alone and associate no other deity with him, pray, give the allotted charity tax (*zakat*), and maintain good relations with kith

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[1] Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2522. He said it is "authentic."

[2] *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4637.

and kin.'"[1] Whoever violates any one of these four tenets shall not enter Heaven.

He taught people that the punishment for severing womb ties is speeded up so that it is meted out in this life. He said: "No other punishment is as worth being speeded up by God so that its perpetrator receives it in this life, with all that is awaiting him still in the afterlife, than the punishment for the sins of oppression and severing womb ties."[2]

He taught them, by the same token and in the same way, that as this punishment is speeded up so is the reward for the one who maintains good relations with kith and kin. He said: "No act I obey God with is more quickly rewarded than joining womb relations; nothing more quickly punished than oppression and severing womb ties."[3]

The Prophet (pbuh) gave examples of the speedy rewards for the one who maintains good relations with his kith and kin, saying: "Joining womb ties, maintaining neighbourly relations and good behaviour prolong life and build prosperous homes."[4]

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people, I added, that whoever wants to double his reward for charity, he should begin with giving alms to the needy next of kin. He said: "Charity to the poor and the needy is one good deed, but to womb relative is doubled- it is at once a charity and an act of joining womb ties."[5]

Zainab, the wife of the Prophet's companion Abdullah bin Masoud, who was very poor, reported that "The Messenger of God (pbuh) said: Give alms, women, even though it be some of your jewelry. (Zainab used to spend her alms money on Abdullah and on orphans she was taking care of.) She returned to Abdullah and said: You are poor and empty handed, and the Messenger of God (pbuh) has commanded us to give alms. You go and ask him

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1309.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 918.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 978.
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 519.
(5) Al-Al-Bani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 1939. He labeled it "authentic."

if it will suffice for me to give alms to you, otherwise I shall give it to someone else. No, you go and ask him, Abdullah said to me. So I went and there was another Ansari woman at the door of the Messenger (pbuh) for the same purpose. Now God's Messenger (pbuh) was invested with awe (so we did not want to knock at his door but waited for Bilal to come out) and when Bilal came out we said to him: Go inform the Messenger that there are two women at the door asking whether it will do to give alms to their spouses and to orphans who are in their care, but do not inform him who we are. Bilal went to the Messenger of God (pbuh) and asked him. The Messenger of God (pbuh) inquired who these women were. He (Bilal) said: They are an Ansari woman and Zainab. Which Zainab, the Prophet asked? The wife of Abdullah, Bilal said. Yes, the Messenger of God (pbuh) said: The reward is doubled for them- they get the reward for benevolence to kith and kin and the reward for alms giving."[1]

Anas bin Malek reported that "Abu 'Talh'a was one of the richest Ansari men in Al-Madina, having lots of money and palm groves. The largest and most valued piece of property he had was a garden known as Beer 'Ha', just opposite the Mosque. The Messenger of God (pbuh) oftentimes visited it and drank from its pleasant water. When the 'Quranic verse- 'You will never attain righteousness till you give freely of what you cherish'[2]- was revealed, Abu 'Talh'a went up the Prophet (pbuh) and said: God says in His Book: 'You will never attain righteousness till you give freely of what you cherish,' and the piece of property I cherish most is Beer 'Ha', so I donate it in charity to God. I hope He would reward me for it. Use it, Messenger of God, in whichever way the Lord has shown you to be fit. The Messenger of God (pbuh) said: Well done! That is a good and fair deal indeed. I heard what you said, Abu 'Talh'a, but I think you should give it in charity to your nearest of kin. So Abu 'Talh'a divided it and distributed it among his relatives and cousins."[3]

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(1) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1667; *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1373.
(2) A'l-'Imran: 92.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1368; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1664.

How wonderful indeed, Father Stephano said- both what Muhammad taught and what Abu 'Talh'a did.

The Godsend Messenger did not only teach people the virtue of giving charity to relatives. He also taught them that providing for the nearest of kin, which is a duty every Muslim is obliged to fulfill, is rewarded as charity giving as well. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "If the Muslim who provides for his household intends what he spends to be and act of charity giving (for which he hopes to be rewarded by God), then it will be counted as such for him."[(1)]

His wife Um Salamah once asked the Prophet (pbuh), and she had children by her former deceased husband, "Would I be rewarded for what I provide for the children I had by their father, Abi Salamah, for they are my children and I shall never leave them unprovided for? Yes, he said. You will be rewarded for what you have spent on them."[(2)]

The real test for Muslims showing compassion and mercy to kith and kin however is when animosity and schism replace intimacy and good relations among relatives. The one who restores these good relations and maintains them has the greater advantage and reward. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The one who rejoins womb ties is not on a par with the one who merely maintains good relations with his relatives. He is rather the one who restores good relations with relatives when his bonds of kinship are severed."[(3)]

The meaning is further clarified by the following Hadeeth: A man came to the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) and said: "I have relatives with whom I try to maintain close relations but they sever them; I treat them well and they treat me ill; I am tolerant and benevolent to them and they are harsh with me. The Prophet said: If you are what you say you are then you in fact shame them, and there will always be an angel on behalf of God

(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1669.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1778; *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1374.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 532.

supporting you against them, as long as you keep it up this way."[1]

The Godsend Messenger (pbuh) always taught that Almighty God is on the side of the compassionate man who shows mercy to his antagonistic relatives, that it is better for this man to pity them and, if they are in need, give charity to them, in the hope that friendly relations are restored. "The best charity," the Prophet (pbuh) said, "is the one given to antagonistic relative."[2]

This sublime status he had accorded to showing mercy to kith and kin in the hierarchy of Islamic social values, I added, made the Prophet (pbuh) spur all Muslims to uphold it. He said: "He who believes in God and the Day of Judgment, let him join (not sever) his womb ties."[3]

He also said: "He who likes his livelihood to be made plentiful, and his lifetime prolonged and blessed, let him join the ties of kinship."[4]

"Learn from your ancestors what helps you join the ties of kinship," the Prophet said, "for maintaining good relations with kith and kin creates amity among people, increases wealth and prolongs life."[5]

Are these Hadeeths in agreement with comparable 'Quranic verses, Father Stephano asked?

Yes, I said. One such 'Quranic verse, warning against harshness with relatives and against severing the ties of kinship, says: "Revere the Lord through Whom you claim (your rights) from one another, and revere the wombs (that bore you)."[6] Another says, putting the harshness against relatives and the

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4640.

(2) Al-Albani, *Irwa' Al-Ghaleel*, Hadeeth no. 892. He said it is "authentic."

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5673. The Prophet (pbuh) says in the rest of the Hadeeth: "He who believes in God and the Last Day let him be generous to his guest; he who believes in God and the Last Day let him say good things or keep quiet."

(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5527; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4638

(5) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 276.

(6) Al-Nisa': 1.

severing ties of kinship on a par with corruption on the face of the earth, "Would you then, given the authority, wreak havoc and corruption in the land and sever your womb ties? Such are the ones God has cursed, deafened and blinded."[1] A third Quranic verse says: "Worship God, ascribe nothing as partner to Him, be kind to parents and to near kindred."[2]

7. His Mercy with Friends

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy and kindness to friends. He considered "The best of friends in God's sight is he who is best to his friends."[3]

As always, he set himself as the ultimate example to show people the value of kindness and good will in maintaining friendship and good relations with others. For when kindness and good will are missing among friends, amity and affection are replaced by schism and hostility, and when schism dominates discord becomes the order of the day, leading to antagonism and social disintegration.

That is why the Prophet took every chance to show mercy and kindness to his friends and companions. The Ansari people of Al-Madina, to whose city he emigrated from Makkah, were particularly near his heart. He loved them dearly and was most kind and benevolent in dealing with them, vowing to be on their side for better and for worse. He even said: "People are my outer garment and Al-Ansar my inner garment (i.e. closer to me). If people were to go down a valley and Al-Ansar were to climb up a mountain path, I would follow the Ansari way. Had there not been emigration (to Makkah) I'd have been one of the Ansar."[4]

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(1) Muhammad: 22-23.
(2) Al-Nissa': 36.
(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 103.
(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 917. (The meaning is that if all people abandoned Al-Ansar, I would be on their side.)

He always commended them to Muslim leaders, telling them: "Whoever is given charge of the Ansar, let him be kind to the benevolent among them, and overlook the failings of the malevolent. Whoever intimidates them distresses this within me, and he pointed to himself."[1] "Be good to Al-Ansar," he used to tell all Muslims, "accept the favours of their benevolent and overlook the failings of their malevolent people."[2]

He called on all Muslims to love them, saying: "No man who believes in God and the Last Day ever hates Al-Ansar."[3]

Equally close to his heart, I added, were the pioneer Muslims who left their homes and possessions behind in Makkah. They emigrated with him to Al-Madinah to escape religious persecution and hold on to the Islamic Faith they had truly believed in and upheld, despite all the harm and torture they had suffered at the hands of pagan unbelievers. The primary concern of the Prophet was to ease the hardship of those pioneering Muslim emigrants and settle them in Al-Madina, which he managed to achieve when he twined both Migrants and Ansari people under the rubric of one Islamic Brotherhood. From then on, the two sides became one altruistic team selflessly seeking the good and well-being of each other.

This mutual benevolence and mercy between the two groups on the one hand, and the Prophet (pbuh) on the other, was manifest on numerous occasions. Perhaps the most touching was what the Companion of the Prophet, Anas bin Malek, reported about the Conquest of the Khandak' (the Trench). The unbeliever polytheists attacked Al-Madinah and the Muslims dug in the city and surrounded it with a wide trench. The Prophet himself (pbuh) took part in the digging as did his companions who, Anas tells us, "used to intone:

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[1] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 917.
[2] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 3509.
[3] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1234.

We who Muhammad had vowed

Forever and ever to uphold Jihad

To which the Prophet (pbuh) would intone back: 'The ultimate good, dear Lord, is the Day of Judgment's/Bless and pardon, dear Lord, the Ansar and the Emigrants.' That day the Prophet (pbuh) was brought barley bread, somewhat mouldy, and they all ate together."[1]

Thus the Prophet (pbuh) taught people camaraderie and kindness to one another, sharing hard times with them, eating what they ate and working like anyone of them, for better and for worse being one of them.

The Prophet (pbuh), I added, always instructed people to show kindness to his companions. "Be good to my companions,"[2] he used to say, and "Keep my memory alive in my companions."[3] He is reported to have also said: "Hold it (i.e. hold your tongues) when my companions are mentioned,"[4] and do not say unpleasant things about them.

Once he heard that a man cursed one of his friends and the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Do not revile my companions. Do not revile my companions. For by Him Who Has my soul in His Hand if anyone of you were to spend (in charity) as much gold as the mountain of Uhud, it would not amount to as much as one *mudd* of (what) anyone of them (would spend); not even half of it."[5]

His bosom friend was Abu Bakre Al-Sidique whose status with the Prophet was unrivaled. The Prophet once said: "If I were to take a khaleel (a soul mate) other than God, I'd certainly have taken Abu Bakre, but suffice it the Islamic bond of

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1102.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 430.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1116.
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 34.
(5) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4610; *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 3397. Uhud is the well-known mountain near Al-Madinah; *mudd* is a standard measure equivalent to two fistfuls of something.

brotherhood and friendship (between us). (In another version but he is my brother and my friend.)"[1]

The point of reference in all this is the 'Quranic verse that outlines the kind of relationship binding the Islamic brethren: "Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those with him are hard on the heathen disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking only the grace of God and (His) acceptance and pleasure."[2]

How we need to foster and promote today the same kind of friendship and camaraderie that Muhammad had promoted and fostered, Father Stephano said.

Why do you say that, I asked?

Because the materialistic life we live today has left us no room for friendship. Man today accepts no other friend but money, and for the sake of money we are willing to sacrifice both companion and friend. How harsh all this is, particularly when set against the teachings of Muhammad.

8. His Mercy with Neighbours

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy and kindness to their neighbours. He said: "The best of neighbour is he who is best to his neigbours."[3]

He always promoted good neighbourly relations, saying: "Whoever believed in God and the Last Day let him harm not his neighbours;"[4] "Whoever believed in God and the Last Day let him honour and be generous to his neighbours;"[5] "Whoever

[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeths no. 3381-3383.
[2] Al-Fat'h: 29.
[3] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha*, Hadeeth no. 103.
[4] *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 68.
[5] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 67.

believed in God and the Last Day let him be kind to his neighbours."[1]

Part of this kindness and generosity to neighbours is offering gifts, regardless of their material value. "Muslim women," the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "None of you should look down on a gift given to her by a neighbouring woman, even if it were the trotters of a sheep (the fleshless part of its legs)."[2]

The Prophet used to ask the Muslim to love his neighbour as himself. "By He Who Has my soul in His Hand, no servant of God believes till he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself."[3]

The man cannot be a believer in God if he does not refrain from harming his neighbour. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "By God, he is no believer, no believer at all. Who Godsend Messenger, his companions asked? He whose neighbour cannot feel safe from his harm, the Prophet said."[4] For Heaven itself is forbidden to the one who harms his neighbour. As the Prophet (pbuh) said: "No man enters Heaven whose neighbour does not feel safe from his harm and evil deeds."[5]

The Muslim might be well known for his thorough execution of religious duties and ritualistic acts of worship, yet only harming his neighbours could well lead him to Hell. The Prophet was told "Such and such a woman stays up the night long praying to God, fasts the whole day and gives charity- but she harms her neighbours with her shrill tongue. She is no good, the Prophet (pbuh) said; she is in Hell."[6]

By the same token, the Muslim might perform only the minimum acts of worship but harms not his neighbours and goes to Heaven. It was said to the Prophet that "Such and such a

(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 69.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2378.
(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 65.
(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeths no. 2550-2551. Heb said it is "authentic."
(5) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 66.
(6) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 190.

woman performs no extra prayers but only what is prescribed, she fasts Ramadan and gives only some dried yogurt in charity and nothing more, but she does not do her neighbours any harm. She is in Heaven, he said."[1]

All this, I added, is due to the sheer happiness and joy a good neighbour brings to his neighbours, and the sheer misery the bad neighbour causes them. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Four things give happiness: the good woman, the spacious house, the good neighbour, and the easy and comfortable riding animal. Four others cause misery: the bad neighbour, the bad woman, the uncomfortable riding animal, and the crammed, poky house."[2]

The Prophet (pbuh) used to say God save us from the bad neighbour, especially in the settled abode, for the bad travelling neighbour is temporary and less oppressive as he is bound to push on. "Say God deliver us from the bad neighbour in the settled abode," the Prophet (pbuh) said, "because the bedouin neighbour is bound to leave."[3] The bedouin tent is movable, that is, unlike built houses where neighbourly relations are more long term.

That is why the Prophet (pbuh) taught people that the punishment for harming one's neighbours- by being rough and harsh with them, and by showing them no mercy- is ten times more severe than harming another person. "It is less guilty of one to commit adultery with ten other women than with his neighbour's wife; and it is less guilty for one to burgle ten houses than his neigbour's house."[4]

Everything the Prophet (pbuh) instructed Muslims to do regarding their neighbours was due in fact to the command Almighty God had given him. It was reported that the Prophet

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 7305.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 282.
(3) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer*, Hadeeth no. 5278. He said it is "authentic."
(4) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 65.

(pbuh) said: "Gabriel kept urging me to be kind to my neighbours till I thought he would give them the right of inheritance."[1]

It is precisely this kind of prophetic education in the school of Muhammad, teaching all sorts of mercy and kindness to neighbours, that manifested itself in the Muslim commitment to their neighbours, regardless of their race, colour or creed. It is reported that Abdullah bin Umar, the companion of the Prophet, slaughtered a sheep for his family and when he returned home he asked: Did you remember to offer our Jewish neighbour some of it as a gift? For I heard the Prophet (pbuh) say: "Gabriel kept urging me to be kind to my neighbours till I thought he would give them the right of inheritance."[2]

9. His Mercy with Slaves and Servants

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to slaves and servants. At the outset, he saw the whole issue of slavery as a fact of life and an existing practice in Jahilite society, involving rights and duties. He had simply to accept it and deal with it as best he could, stressing above all else the need for justice. He said: "Your bondspersons are your brothers. God has put them under your care, and whoever has a brother under his care should feed him of what he eats and clothe him of what he wears. Do not overburden them with work or task them to do things beyond their power. If you ask them to do demanding work then help them."[3]

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "The bondsperson has the right to his food, water, clothes and rest. Bond people must not be overburdened with work and if you charge them with heavy

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5556.

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2574. He said it is "authentic."

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2395.

duties then help them. (You are all) Slaves of God, so do not abuse creatures like yourselves."[1]

Perhaps the most civilized and basic right a slave has is not to be called so: to abolish the appellation slave man and slave woman altogether. This in fact was one of the rights a bondsperson enjoyed in the school of Muhammad. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Let none of you say my slave man (*abdi*) and my slave woman (*amati*) but say my lad (*fatai*), my lass (*fatati*) and my boy (*ghulami*)."[2] Address them, that is, exactly as free people are addressed.

On many occasions the Prophet (pbuh) outlined detailed rules about the way to treat bond people and serfs. First, he taught people to forgive them if they misbehaved or made mistakes, no matter how often they repeated them. It is reported that a man came to him and said: "How often should I pardon the servant (and overlook the mistakes he makes), Godsend Messenger? Seventy times a day, the Prophet said."[3]

He then taught people how to treat them when they do well or ill. He said: "If they did well accept it; if ill pardon them; if they defy and overpower you then sell them."[4]

They should be treated kindly and mercifully in all situations. When they do too much damage and their behaviour is impossible to cope with or rectify, they should not be treated in any harsh way but simply sold.

This is what the Prophet stressed on another occasion. He said: "Feed the servants you find suitable for you of what you eat and clothe them of what you wear. The ones you find unsuitable

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(1) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no 2284. He said it is "authentic."

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 366.

(3) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2289. He said it is "authentic"

(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2283.

for you, sell them. Do not abuse or torture Almighty God's creatures."[1]

As for the Muslim who treats his bondspersons harshly, even by withholding or delaying their meals, the Prophet (pbuh) considered it a sin for which the perpetrator will be punished. The Prophet said: "Suffice it a sin to withhold food from those you possess."[2]

It is the duty of a Muslim to appreciate the good work a bondsperson or servant does, in preparing his food for instance. "If a servant of yours prepared your meal well and made it to his taste, neither too hot or too cold," the Prophet said, "the man should sit the servant with him to eat and, if the servant refused, he should serve him some of the food with his own hand."[3]

Even if the man's own son were in place of the servant, Father Stephano hastened to say, he wouldn't treat him more mercifully and kindly. Perhaps one wouldn't serve his son with his own hand!

If the opposite happens and the bondsperson or servant is subjected to harsh treatment or torture, then severe punishment is due. The perpetrator would find himself in an unenviable situation, for as Prophet (pbuh) said: "The expiation for whoever slaps his bondsperson or beats him is to manumit him."[4]

The punishment of the master therefore, Father Stephano said, is turned into an act of mercy to the slave! If the slave suffers the cruelty of his master, the noose of slavery itself is lifted off his neck, isn't it? The slaves in the school of Muhammad were in fact no slaves at all.

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 739.

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2287. He said it is "authentic."

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 415; *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2370 (in another version).

(4) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3130; Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2278. He said it is "authentic."

This was not just theorizing but actual practice in the real world, I said, as was always the case in the school of Muhammad.

One day a rash old man slapped his servant and Suwaid bin Mugren, a companion of the Prophet (brother of N'uman Al-Mogen), told him: "Couldn't you have controlled yourself and refrained from slapping her face. Don't you know it is forbidden? You see, I was the seventh of my seven brothers during the lifetime of the Godsend Messenger (pbuh). We had only one servant, and one day one of us lost his temper and slapped her on the face. God's Messenger (pbuh) commanded us there and then to set her free."(1)

The son of this companion of the Prophet, Mu'awiyah bin Suwaid bin Mugren, reported that "I slapped a bond person of mine and he ran away. Shortly before the midday prayer, my father summoned me and the slave and told him: punish him, but the slave pardoned me."(2)

Good God, Father Stephano said! The slave punishing his master! The history of slavery in the west had never known a thing like that, neither in the far nor before the abolishing of slavery in the near past.

Now I know the historical evidence for what the American orientalist Snichs said: "Muhammad protected the right of the slave and ordered that he should be treated like a member of the family,"(3) Father Stephano said after a moment's reflection.

And had this slave not pardoned the son of his master, I added, it would have been his right to be set free. For Suwaid knew full well the punishment of slapping slaves in the school of Muhammad (pbuh). He knew the Prophet's Hadeeth that says: "The expiation for whoever slaps his bondsperson or beats him is to manumit him."(4)

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(1) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 3133.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 3132.
(3) *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb,* cit., p, 42.
(4)*Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 3130; Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 2278. He said it is "authentic."

Turning cruelty to bondspersons to their advantage inevitably transcends the specific person and the individual case involved. It extends kindness and mercy to all members of the group by virtue of the mercy shown to the individual. It is reported that Abu Massoud Al-Badri, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), said: "I was whipping a bond boy of mine when I heard a voice coming from behind me, saying: you must know Aba Massoud. I was so angry I could not make out what was being said. As the man drew nearer I recognized the voice of God's Messenger (pbuh) saying: You must know Aba Massoud that Almighty God is a far better judge than you are of this boy. I said: Please, Godsend Prophet, I beg of you! I will never strike a bondsperson again."[1]

Other students in the school of Muhammad went much farther than Abu Massoud. It was reported that 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet (pbuh), said: "A man came and sat in the presence of God's Messenger and said: I have two bondspersons who constantly cheat me, disobey me and lie to me, and I curse them and beat them up in return. How am I to be judged? The Prophet (pbuh) said: On the Day of Judgment their bad deeds of betrayal, cheating and lying will be counted and if your punishment is equal to their sins, you would be square. If however your punishment exceeds their guilt you will pay for the extra maltreatment. The man started screaming and crying, and the Prophet told him: Haven't you heard what God Almighty said in the Quranic verse- 'And We set the just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in aught. Though it be of

[1] Al-Albany, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2277. He said it is "authentic." In another version of the Hadeeth, Abu Massoud says: "He is a free man, Prophet of God, I said. Had you not manumitted him, a flame of Hell fire would have scorched you."

The British theological scholar Karen Armstrong says: "One of the constituent elements of the Islamic Mission was to enshrine mercy and pity and promote their feeling in the Islamic society from the start. Here again, Muhammad was an example to follow. It is reported that one day he saw a bond boy doing some hard work. He sneaked up behind him and put his hands on the boy's eyes like children playfully do. The bond boy said it must be the Prophet, for no one else would think of easing his hardship with such an amicable gesture." K. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, cit., pp. 342-343.

the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We bring it. And We suffice for reckoners.'[1] Please, Prophet of God, the man said, I can find no better way than to do away with them. As you are my witness, they are both free."[2]

All this, I added, is assuming the bondsperson deserves the punishment. If he doesn't, and was harshly treated, then this is a wholly different matter. The judgment here is unto Almighty God. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Whoever wrongfully beat a bondsperson, he would be punished for it on the Day of Judgment."[3] It is also reported that he said: "Whoever falsely accuses his bondsperson, the due punishment (*Al-hadd*) will be imposed on him on the Day of Judgment."[4]

The following Hadeeth, I added, sums up the way the Prophet (pbuh) himself treated whoever served him. It is reported that Anas bin Malek, the companion of the Prophet and his attendant, said: "I have served the Prophet (pbuh) for over ten years and never for once did he say to me 'fie!' or 'why did you do this' or 'would you do that.'"[5]

This is concerning the rights of servants and bondspersons. As for carrying out their duties, towards God Almighty and towards their owners, it was entirely to their advantage, an act of mercy towards them both in this life and in the afterlife. It is reported that Prophet (pbuh) said: "Any bondsperson who carries out his duties towards God and towards his owners will be doubly rewarded."[6] It is also reported that he said: "The bondsperson who gives his master good advice and who worships God well will be doubly rewarded."[7]

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(1) Al-Anbia': 47.
(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2290. He said it is "authentic."
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no., 2280. He said it is "authentic."
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no., 2281. He said it is "authentic."
(5) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5578.
(6) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2361.
(7) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2360.

With all this in mind, one should not be surprised to read the following Hadeeth: "The devoted and pious bondsperson is doubly rewarded," Abu Hurairay reported that the Prophet said. Abu Hurairah himself added "By Him Who Has my soul in His hand, had it not been for the jihad in God's Cause and filial piety towards my mother, I would have liked to die as a bondsperson."(1)

Goodness me, Father Stephano said, clearly delighted and enraptured! Thanks to the mercy and kindness accorded to slaves in the school of Muhammad, slavery has become an honour coveted by the righteous and pious Muslim people.

Over and above all this humane, kind and merciful treatment of bondspersons and servants Muhammad had advocated and taught in his school, I added, he still called for an even greater mercy towards them.

And is there greater mercy than what you have just mentioned, Father Stephano wondered?

Yes, I said. He called for the manumission of slaves altogether some one thousand four hundred years ago. Muhammad (pbuh) took every possible chance to call upon Muslims to free their bondsmen and women, saying: "Whoever sets free a Muslim bondsperson, God will save from Hell Fire a part of his body for every part of the bondsperson's."(2)

He also said: "Any man who sets free a Muslim bondsperson, God will save from Hell Fire every part of his body corresponding to every part of the freed bondsperson's body."(3) Similarly he said: "Any man who sets free a Muslim bondsperson, it is his shield from Hell Fire, a bone saved for every bone freed from slavery; every woman who sets free a Muslim bondswoman,

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(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2362. See also the editing of this Hadeeth in *Fath Al-Bari* (Chapter on Manumission). It includes preponderate argument in support of authenticating Abu Hurairah's words with reference to supplementary material.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 2681.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 2333.

it is her shield from Hell Fire, a bone saved for every bone freed from slavery."[1]

There is yet another kind of mercy so full of nobility and humaneness that Muhammad (pbuh) taught in his school. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "A master of a bondswoman who teaches her good manners, educates her in the best possible way, manumits her and then marries her is doubly rewarded."[2]

Mercy indeed, Father Stephano said! Muhammad's mercy had elevated the bondswoman from the status of slavery to that of the free wife!

With all this mercy the Godsend Prophet (pbuh) had shown to servants and bondspersons, a mercy which filled his soul and which he labouriously taught to students in his school, it is hardly surprising that the Prophet's last wish before he died was that Muslims looked after the bondsmen and women under their care. Ka'b bin Malek reported that "Five days before the Godsend Messenger (pbuh) died, I heard him say, momentarily falling unconscious: 'Obey God in your bondspersons. Fill their bellies, clothe their bodies and talk to them kindly."[3]

Anas bin Malek reported that "The last wish of the Prophet (pbuh) at his moment of death was to observe 'prayer, prayer and (to mind) the bondspersons you have in your possession.' He kept repeating the throttled words choked up in his chest which his tongue could barely utter."[4]

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(1) A-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer*, Hadeeth no. 4465. He said it is "authentic."

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2361. Al-Bukhari reports this Hadeeth in a different version which states that "The Prophet (pbuh) said: 'Three persons will have a double reward- a person from the people of the Scriptures who believed in his prophet (Jesus or Moses) and then believed in the Prophet Muhammad; a bondsperson who carries out his duties to Allah and to his master; and a master of a bondswoman who teaches her good manners, educates her in the best possible way, manumits her and then marries her.'" Hadeeth no. 95.

(3) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2288. He said it is "authentic" by virtue of other supporting Hadeeths.

(4) Al-Albani, *Takhreej Ahadeeth Fi'kh Al-Sirah*, Hadeeth no. 486. He said it is "authentic." See also Al-Albani, Al-*Silsilah* Al-*Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 868.

All this mercy shown to servants and serfs however was only an itemization of the general commands summed up in the revealed 'Quranic verses that instructed Muslims to be kind to them. One such venerable 'Quranic verse categorically states: "Worship God (alone), join no partner with Him, show kindness to parents… and to those (bondspersons) in your possession. For God loves not the self-conceited and boastful."(1)

Another 'Quranic verse says: "Those slaves who ask for a deed in writing (to buy their freedom), do give it to them if you know they are good, and do give them some of God's money He had bestowed on you."(2)

Yet another 'Quranic verse says: "O mankind! We have created you male and female, and made you peoples and tribes so that you get to know one another. The noblest amongst you in the sight of God is the most pious and righteous."(3) Now, according to this 'Quranic verse, it could well be that the bondsperson is more pious than his master and, therefore, much more noble in the sight of God.

A saying I read in *The Life of Muhammad* springs to my mind here, Father Stephano said. The writer, Emil Dremenghem, stated that "Although Muhammad did not abolish slavery, he organized it in such a way as to limit it down to a minimum, turning manumission into a good deed, even an act of expiation for some sins and offenses." It is indeed a true and valid testimony. Still, Father Stephano added, don't you think that the age of slavery is over and done with, following the official Declaration of Human Rights and the abolishing of slavery all over the world?

Are you serious, I asked?

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(1) Al-Nisa': 36.
(2) Al-Nur: 33.
(3) Al-'Hujurat: 13.

Could be, he said, tongue in cheek, were it not for the real world which gives the lie to it.

In what way, I asked?

Well, slavery is abolished in Human Rights Conventions and Charters but only on paper, only in files kept in bureaucratic drawers and archives, Father Stephano said. Facts of life in the real world however tell a different story.

How, I said?

The least one can say about slavery today is that it is spreading in human societies at a higher rate and in an uglier way than before. The Western civilization blows hot air and gives us a lot of propaganda and theoretical stuff about banning the slave trade, especially among blacks. Yet, in practice, it sanctions various ways and means to protect the slave trade, particularly in the white slave market. Quite often it combines white and black slave trading in well-established, professional institutions found on the money earned from running prostitution networks all over the world. The honour and dignity of men and women, often children too, are bought and sold for the highest bidder in secret markets.

In addition to the white slave market, drug trafficking is also rampant and also controlled by widespread networks worldwide, protected by mafias and organized crime. Here too the lives of men, women and children are traded in an increasingly lucrative market.

And for the life of me I haven't clue as to why the western media targets the drug trade at the expense of the white slave markets, he added?

And do you expect this "civilized business" to boom, I asked?

It is already a booming business. In fact it will keep booming so long as it is a business, so long as our media and our human laws, constitutions and legislatures will keep teaching people that the end justifies the means.

But the whole edifice of western civilization is based on this kind of Machiavellianism.

And nothing but this damned Machiavellian dictum will destroy the western civilization as we know it today.

10. His Mercy with Orphans

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Messenger of God (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to orphans. He encouraged his students to sponsor and adopt orphans so that children who lost their parents can still have the proper nurture and education they need till they grow up and become self-sufficient. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Paradise is a must for whoever takes an orphan into his, or other people's, care till the time God makes him (the orphan) self-sufficient."(1)

He even twined himself with the sponsor of orphans. He said: "The sponsor of an orphan and I are like this in Heaven, and he showed his index and middle fingers together, slightly parted."(2)

Considering the gentle and mellowing effect mercy to orphans engenders, the Prophet (pbuh) turned it into a cathartic cure for inner harshness. A man came to the Prophet (pbuh) once complaining of his own hard heatedness and lack of compassion. The Prophet told him: "If you want to soften your heart, show mercy to an orphan, gently stoke his head and feed him of what you eat. Your heart will become tender of its own accord..."(3)

This is assuming the orphan child is poor and has no money and no one to care or fend for him. The sponsor in this case will be rewarded as outlined above. If however the orphan child is

(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2882.

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeths no. 4892 and 5546. Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 800.

(3) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer*, Hadeeth no. 80. He said it is "authentic."

wealthy and the opportunists and greedy people, as usual, rush to take advantage of him and put him under their care and protection for the sake of his money, the Prophet (pbuh) firmly blocked their way. He warned against the dire consequences of swindling orphans or eating up their wealth, saying: "Avoid the seven noxious things, the Prophet (pbuh) said. And what are they, the people asked? He said: To join others in worship along with God, to practice sorcery, to kill the life that God had forbidden except in a just cause, to practice usury, to appropriate orphan money, to dodge fighting the enemy and fleeing from the battlefield, and to falsely accuse chaste and innocent Muslim women."(1)

In his book *Muhammad*, the western historian William Muir was absolutely right in saying: "Yes, Muhammad was a real mercy to orphans."(2)

Exploiting orphans has thus become parallel to worshipping false gods and other self-destructive practices. The strict warning the Prophet (pbuh) gave was sufficient to deter opportunists and put an end to their greed for the wealth of orphans.

It is a totally different story with the decent people who sponsor orphans and protect their wealth. Ibn Abbas reported that "When Almighty God revealed the two 'Quranic verses- 'Come not near the wealth of the orphan save in the better way (i.e. the way which seeks to increase it) till he becomes of age,'(3) and ' Those who devour the wealth of orphans wrongfully, they do but swallow fire in their bellies, and they will be exposed to the burning flames,'(4) those who took orphans under their care started separating their food and drinks from the orphans'. What was left of the orphans' meals was kept aside for them to eat. Quite often the food went bad and guardians found it hard to cope with the situation and they told the Prophet about it.

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 2560.
(2) Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb,* cit. p. 46.
(3) Al-An'am: 152; Al-Isra': 34.
(4) Al-Nisa': 10.

Almighty God then revealed the 'Quranic verse: 'And they ask you about orphans. Say: To improve their lot is best. No harm if you mix your shares with theirs; they are your brothers and God knows whoever makes ill and well.'[(1)] Muslims then returned to mixing their orphans' shares of food and water with their own."[(2)]

Muhammad was lucky to have had such a group of students who meticulously judged themselves before they were judged, Father Stephano said.

It is Islam, Father Stephano, I said. There was nothing special about these same students before the advent of Islam.

That's right, he said.

Numerous verses in the venerable 'Quran were revealed one after the other, promoting kindness and showing mercy to orphans. "Oppress not the orphan,"[(3)]Almighty God said in one of them.

Another verse considered providing food for orphans a kind of thanksgiving through which the believer acknowledges the blessings of the Lord by "Feeding in the day of hunger an orphan near of kin."[(4)]

A third praised the believer who hands out his treasured possessions to relatives, orphans and needy people. The righteous, the verse says, is he who "purely for the love of God gives away wealth to kinsfolk, orphan, the needy, the wayfarer and the beggars…"[(5)]

A fourth verse categorically prohibited cruelty to orphans and censured the perpetrator of such cruelty. It put the unbeliever on a par with "He who shuns the orphan."[(6)]

[(1)] Al-Ba'karah: 220.
[(2)] Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Sunan Abi Dawood,* Hadeeth no. 2871. He said it is "fair."
[(3)] Al-Dhu'ha: 9.
[(4)] Al-Balad: 14-15.
[(5)] Al-Ba'karah: 177.
[(6)] Al-Ma'un: 1-2.

More 'Quranic verses followed, outlining the rules of sponsoring orphans and protecting their property till they become of age and fully capable of managing their own affairs.

But when does an orphan become of age and well capable of managing his own affairs, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) clearly specified the time when the orphan becomes of age and fully responsible for his acts, I said.

Which is when exactly?

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "No orphanhood after sexual awareness."[1]

11. His Mercy with the Weak, the Poor, the Sick, the Needy and the Calamity Stricken

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Godsend Messenger (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy and kindness to the weaker element in society- the poor, the sick, the needy and the distressed.[2] It would take very long indeed to review everything mentioned in this regard, so I'll just give you the gist. Perhaps every poor, needy and weak person would thank the Lord for the state he is in when he reads the first Hadeeth.

Which is?

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Please God, let me live and die a poor man; pray you, Lord, bring me back to life on the Day of Resurrection with the weak and the destitute."[3] Now who wouldn't be happy to be like the Godsend Messenger (pbuh) in this life then be in his company on the Day of Resurrection?

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(1) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dha'if Sunan Abi Dawood*, Hadeeth no. 2873. He said it is "authentic."

(2) All these appellations are grouped under one heading due to the proximity of their occurrence in the Hadeeths of the Prophet (pbuh) and their closely related meanings.

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 308.

This was the starting point of the Prophet's long journey with the weak and the poor since the beginning of the Islamic Mission. The poor in fact were the first pillar of the Islamic edifice and the pioneering fathers who first believed in Islam and embraced it. No wonder the Prophet (pbuh) kept their company and enraged the elite lords and masters of his tribe who could not understand his preferences. Abdullah bin Massoud reported that "The elders of 'Quraish passed by the Prophet (pbuh) and found Suhaib, Bilal, 'Ammar, Khabab and other poor and meek Muslims with him. Get rid of this riff raff, Muhammad, the elders said. Are those the ones you have chosen and accepted of all your people?! Are we supposed to be their followers?! Are they the ones God had blessed and elected of the whole lot of us?! Maybe if you get rid of them we will reach out to you and come to your camp. The 'Quranic verse was then revealed: 'Expel not those who pray day and night to their Lord, seeking only His countenance. You are not accountable for them in aught, nor are they accountable for you in aught, that you should turn them away and be one of the oppressors and wrong-doers.'[(1)]"[(2)]

Muhammad's mercy and kindness to the poor and the weak went along these lines. His God so commanded him and Muhammad never forgot His commandments. He preferred the poor and the meek believers to the mighty and the arrogant polytheists of his people, drawing a sharp contrast between the two. "Shall I tell you about the dwellers of Heaven?'" he asked then answered: "'They are every weak and weakening person whose wishes God would fulfill were he to take an oath to do something. And shall I tell you about the dwellers of Hell? They are all those violent, arrogant and stubborn people."[(3)]

Nor did their friendship (pbuh) weaken but grew stronger over the years. He was always seen in the company of the poor, the slaves, the widows and other weaker elements in society, always talking to them, easing their pain, doing his best to help

(1) Al-An'am: 52.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 3297.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5610.

them meet their needs. His companions often reported that "The Prophet (pbuh) was never arrogant and he never disdained being in the company of widows, slaves or poor people. He did everything in his power to make sure they had what they needed."[(1)]

The Prophet (pbuh) called on all Muslims to show mercy to them and offer them a helping hand. He promised the ones who assist them the highest of all rewards, the prize only the closest to God aspire to obtain. It is reported that he said: "The one who seeks to help the widow and the poor is no different from the one who fights in the cause of God or the one who stays up all night praying and all day fasting."[(2)]

"Shall I tell you about the best of God's people," the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have told his companions on another occasion? "He is the weak and humble person in his shabby and tattered clothes, to whom no one pays any attention. He is the one whose wishes God would fulfill were he to take an oath to do something."[(3)] As such, being God's best people, it is only natural that whoever offers them help and shows mercy to them would get the highest of rewards.

The prophet (pbuh) was always considerate and gentle in dealing with the weak, even in questions pertaining to acts of worship in which he never usually compromised. Abu Said Al-Khudari reported that "the Prophet (pbuh) led us in the '*Isha*' (night) prayer well into the night. When he finished he told us: sit your selves down and so we did. He said: The people finished praying long time ago and are already in their beds. You should know that you are at prayer still so long as you wait for the next prayer. You should know, too, that had it not been for the weakness of the weak and the illness of the ill (in another version

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(1) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer,* Hadeeth no. 9136. He said it is "authentic."

(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 5993.

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 2904. He said it is "authentic" by virtue of other supporting Hadeeths.

of the Hadeeth 'and the need of the needy'), I would have gone on with this prayer for yet another part of the night."(1)

It is reported that he (pbuh) said: "Whoever leads the people in prayer let him go_easy and make it brief, because among the congregation are the sick, the weak and people who have (urgent) things to attend to."(2)

"Whoever leads people in prayer," the Prophet (pbuh) is also reported to have said, "let him be considerate and make it short, because in the congregation there are sick and weak people or people with (pressing) business to attend to. When one prays on his own however he can pray the way he likes."(3)

The Prophet (pbuh) told the strong people not to hurt the weak unwittingly. He is reported to have told Omar bin Al-Khattab: "You are a strong man, Omar. Be careful not hurt the weak."(4)

The Prophet himself used to mind that. His companions reported that "The Prophet (pbuh) often slowed his pace in travelling so as to join the people in the back, spur the weak on, support them and pray for them."(5)

He even asked the weaker people in particular to join him and be always close to him, and he encouraged others to do the same so as to spread the spirit of mercy and kindness towards them. "Bring the weak closer to me," he used to say; "for you are blessed with plenty and with victory by virtue of the weaker element amongst you."(6)

That is why the Prophet (pbuh) always took part in the social occasions of the weak and the poor, setting himself an example

(1) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 618.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 716.
(3) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no, 1134. He said it is "authentic."
(4) Al-Albani, *Manasek Al-Hajj wa Al-'Umrah*, Hadeeth no. 32. He said it is strongly authenticated.
(5) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2120.
(6) A-Albani, *Sahih wa Dhai'f Sunan Al-Nisa'*i, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 3179. He said it is "authentic."

for others to follow. It is reported that "the Prophet (pbuh) used to call on weak and poor Muslims, asking about them, visiting their sick and attending their funerals."(1)

Still, I added, the Prophet (pbuh) did not advocate mercy towards the weak only on individual bases. He surely wanted mercy to spread across the whole length of the Islamic world when he said: "Unholy is the land where the weak are not given their rights wholly and unequivocally."(2)

How far we are from all this, Father Stephano said! Who would wholly unequivocally give the weak their rights today?!

The courts of law, I suppose. Their doors are open to people asking for their rights.

But how could the weaker element in society afford to reach the law courts with all the hefty sums of money they have to pay- mounting legal expenses, lawyers' fees, all kinds of duties, taxes and tariffs, Father Stepahno said. The weak person would never get back what is rightfully his unless he pays much more than its worth!

And where do you think the problem lies, I asked?

Well, surely, in present-day judicial systems. They are designed to serve only the rich and the powerful.

And? What's the way out?

Oh if only I could get my voice heard! I'd have called for a return to the school of Muhammad. It *is* the way out, giving each person his due rights even if he was sitting in the comfort of his own home.

Let's hope someone out there is listening, I said.

As for the poor, the Prophet (pbuh) was always concerned about them. So concerned in fact that he allotted a specific place (called Al-Safah) for them in his Mosque. Poor Muslims used to

(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha,* Hadeeth no. 2112.

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 1818. He said it is "authentic."

gather and stay in it to draw the attention of other Muslims to their plight with every prayer, five times a day that is, so as to offer them a helping hand and provide for them till they can fend for themselves again.

The Prophet (pbuh) always reminded Muslims of the plight of the poor. It is reported that he said: "The best of deeds is that which brings happiness to a believer's heart, whether you clothe his body, fill his belly or provide for his need."[1]

The Prophet (pbuh) conveyed to people God's severe admonishment on the Day of Judgment regarding their attitude and behaviour towards the poor. It is reported in the sacred Hadeeth that God Almighty tells human beings on the Day of Judgment: "Son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not provide for me. The man would say: My Lord, how could I have fed You and You are the Lord of the worlds? Almighty God would say: Did you not know that such and such a servant of Mine asked you for food and you did not feed him? Were you not aware that had you fed him you would have got your reward from Me? Son of Adam, I asked you for a drink of water but you did not oblige Me. The man would say: My Lord, how could I have given a drink of water and You are the Lord of the worlds? The Lord would say: Such and such a servant of Mine asked you for a drink of water and you did not oblige him. Had you given him water that day you would have got your reward from Me."[2]

The Prophet (pbuh) was frequently seen labouring to assuage the pain of the poor and try hard as he could to meet their needs and ease the agony of their destitution and hunger. With all the mercy and compassion he showed them, they no longer felt less esteemed by God than their rich compatriots but rather more privileged. The pain and bitterness poverty had engendered and lodged deep in their souls[3] were replaced by a sense of

(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2090.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4661.
(3) The following lines of Urwa bin Al-Ward aptly capture the contemptuous look with which the pre-Islamic (*Jahilite*) society viewed poverty, and which Islam changed radically by the mercy the Prophet (pbuh) showed to the poor. Urwa said:

contentment and serenity. One of them, Abu Thar Al-Ghufari, reported that he said: "Prophet of God, have the rich got away with all the wages and rewards? They pray like we do, fast like we fast, but they have their surplus wealth with which they hand out charity and alms giving, whereas we have nothing to give! The Prophet (pbuh) said: Aba Thar, shall I teach you some words if you say them you can catch up with whoever was ahead of you and without anyone ever catching up with you except those who do the same as you do? "Say 'God is Great' thirty-three times at the end of every prayer, followed by 'Thanks be The Lord' thirty-three times, and 'Praise be the Lord' thirty-three times then round up by 'God is One, no partner to Him, to Him all earthly possessions and unto Him all thanks and praise, the Omnipotent and all Capable.' Whoever says this prayer, he'd be absolved of all his sins even if they were numerous as the sea foam."[1]

Since all earthly possessions ultimately belong to God, the Muslim poor felt no less privileged than the rich. And like the rich, the Prophet (pbuh) instructed the poor to give charity, which granted them a sense of dignity and self-esteem and was one of the most important aspects of showing mercy to them. The same Abu Thar Al-Ghufari reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "With every sunrise, every living soul must give charity to itself. I said: And how can we give charity, Prophet of God, and we have no money? The Prophet said: The many kinds of charity include saying 'God is Great,' 'Praise be the Lord,' 'Thanks be the Lord,' 'God is One,' 'Forgive me Lord;' they include promoting virtues and prohibiting vices; removing thorns, bones and stones from the roads; leading the blind to where they are going; helping the deaf and dumb and make them understand what was said; guiding the inquirer to the whereabouts of something he needs; rushing to the aid of somebody desperately calling for help;

To become rich do let me endeavour, for the poor I see is the worst man ever:
Most easy to ditch, least likely to reach, though favour he has and honour;
Yelled at by the youngster, kept out by the kind, disdained by his paramour.

[1] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 100.

giving a helping hand to the weak. All theses are kinds of charity one can hand out to himself."[1]

The Prophet gave the poor the ultimate comfort every soul seeks and every believer in God wishes for when he said: "I looked around in Heaven and found that the vast majority of its people are the poor."[2]

But don't you see that the school of Muhammad had thus treated social ills like poverty with afterlife promises without actually changing the material infrastructure of society. In modern times Communism, for instance, called for the redistribution of wealth between rich and poor so as to change the material bases of social life and thus ensure a sense of justice?

Hold on, Father Stephano, I said. Had you studied the laws of Islamic Charity Tax (*zakat*) and Alms Giving (*sadakah*) you wouldn't have said so.

And how would I study them, he asked?

By studying the Islamic society at the time when the Islamic *Shari'a* Laws were applied.

And what would I find if I did, he asked?

You'd find that the laws of *zakat* and *sadakah* had managed to root out poverty altogether from the Islamic society. Images of beggars and poor people crowding the streets of Islamic cities became a thing of the past. They were totally erased from living memory, simply because no one could see them anymore anywhere. In fact the welfare government officials responsible for distributing *zakat* money to the poor and the needy could no longer find any one to accept hand outs. Everybody became self-sufficient.[3]

Do you know why, I asked?

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[1] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 575.
[2] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 3002.
[3] See books on Islamic civilization and Islamic economics which deal at length with these issues.

You tell me?

Because the teachings of the school of Muhammad (pbuh), in keeping with God's commandments, demanded belief in the pledges of the hereafter first, but along with them they acknowledged the right to enjoy the benefits of the here and now. Exactly as the 'Quranic verse states: "With the wealth God had bestowed on you, seek the abode of the hereafter but do not forget your share of this life. Be kind to others as God had been kind to you."(1) Such moderation, such quest for the middle ground between the prerequisites of this life and the afterlife, has enabled Islam to go on to the present day, to be over one thousand four hundred years old.

You're right, he said. It seems to me that the power of Islam lies precisely in this marvelous blend between the prerogatives of this life and the afterlife.

You know full well that the Communist way you mentioned has miserably failed. It lasted less than a century then totally collapsed. Do you know why it didn't last long?

Why?

Mainly for two reasons- first it abolished the hereafter altogether. It removed the spiritual life completely off of its agenda.

And the other?

It laboured to apply material justice by confiscating the property and wealth of the rich and rechannel them to the pockets of a group of authoritarian party apparatchiks who called themselves "the State". The big-brother State invested the money in projects the poor knew nothing about, except perhaps their names, brandished day and night in its propagandist media. Instead of a society composed of rich, middle and poor segments, society has become composed of a minority of rich authoritarians who have everything and the middle and poor people who have

(1) Al-'Kasas: 77.

nothing. Besides, what did all this class hatred between rich and poor really achieve? Did it eradicate poverty? How different all this indeed is from Islamic moderation and its constant search for the middle ground! How different from the Islamic sense of justice which takes from the rich and gives to the poor in order to bring both closer to each other, to bring them together within a framework of love and co-operation among a people seeking the benefits of both this life and the afterlife!

More than this, I added. The well-off Muslim still insists on giving the poor their due share of his wealth, even if the application of the Islamic Charity Tax laws was vitiated by governments that would not collect *zakat* money. Charity NGOs are formed all over the world to uphold this basic Islamic tenet. They voluntarily collect Charity Tax and alms giving money from the rich who willingly hand it over to the poor. They keep both sides contented and happy, both thankful and obliged to their fair and just Lord.

You make me eager to start thinking seriously about doing research on solutions to the problem of poverty in the school of Muhammad.

You'd spare yourself the effort and find all the answers you need if you went back to what Muslim thinkers had written on the subject. It is a closed subject, really, way over-researched, I said. Still, maybe if you could do it your way you would introduce it to the western society you live in.

Let us go back to the kinds of mercy shown to the weak, I said. A man may not be weak, poor or needy but quite strong and well-off who would suddenly fall ill or suffer a sudden calamity that would weaken him. He would then know what's it like to feel frail and be overwhelmed by a sense of inner vulnerability. He would then need the comfort and mercy of others to help him pull himself together and cope with his calamity. The Prophet of course was not oblivious to this kind of mercy. He taught people in his school that such a man deserves all the good will and the

mercy of others, perhaps much more so than the poor and weak person who is able to cope with the suffering and cruelty entailed.

One after another, the Prophet's Hadeeths outlined the way to show kindness and mercy to the sick and grief-stricken people. It instructed Muslims to visit the sick and comfort the distressed. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "He who calls on a sick person keeps wading in the waters of mercy till he returns (home). If he stays over with the sick person however he is wholly immersed in mercy."[(1)]

"A Muslim has five duties towards his brother Muslim," the Prophet (pbuh) said: "To say (the Islamic) greetings back (i.e. 'peace upon you too'), to accept invitations, to attend funerals, to visit the sick, to say 'God Have mercy on you' (the Islamic equivalent of 'bless you') when somebody sneezes and says 'thank the Lord.'"[(2)]

The Prophet (pbuh) used to tell people to "feed the hungry, visit the sick, ransom the captive."[(3)]

Visiting the sick in particular was turned into such an important act of mercy that Almighty God Himself will ask man about it on the Day of Resurrection. It is reported in the Divine Hadeeth that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "On the Day of Judgment Almighty God would say: Son of Adam, I was sick and you did not visit Me. The man would say: My Lord, how could I have visited You and You are the Lord of the worlds? God would say: Didn't you know that such and such a servant of Mine was ill and you didn't visit him? Were you not aware that had you visited him you'd have found Me with him?"[(4)] It is a reminder to Muslims that visiting sick people is abundantly rewarded by Almighty God.

As usual, the Prophet (pbuh) set himself as an example to follow. He always visited the sick people and prayed God for

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 1929.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1832.
(3) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 1523. He said it is "authentic.
(4) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4661.

their recovery. The Hadeeths concerning this aspect of his mercy are countless indeed.

Perhaps the most important aspect of showing mercy and kindness to patients is the endeavour to cure them, which is what the Prophet (pbuh) instructed Muslims to do. "God has never created a malady but with its remedy along with it, known to some and unknown to others," he said. "Except *al-sam*," he added. "And what is *al-Sam*, Prophet of God, they asked? Death, he said."[1]

The Prophet (pbuh) often prescribed some medications to patients- like cupping, which tops the list of treatments for many illnesses today; the black cumin (the Blessing Seed) whose benefits have been recently discovered by present day herbalists and physicians; and honey whose good uses are well known.

The Prophet (pbuh) even set forth to people a basic medical law within the parameters of which modern medicine still operates- applying the right medicine to the right illness to heal and achieve recovery. "There is a remedy for every malady," the Prophet (pbuh) said, "and when the right remedy is applied to the right ailment it is cured with the grace of God, the Exalted and Glorious."[2] When you hit the right medicine for the disease, that is, it is bound to be cured with the grace of God Almighty.

If the right medication is not found and pain is inevitable, countless Hadeeths by the Prophet (pbuh) seek to sooth and comfort the pained person, whether due to illness or not, promising him rewards from God Almighty to make up for his suffering. The stricken person feels as if a merciful, gentle hand patting him on the shoulder and stroking his head, easing his pains, giving him hope and filling his soul with a sense of security

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[1] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 1650

[2] *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4084. In his book *The Orientalist: In Search of a Man Caught between East and the West,* T. Reiss says: "Muhammad's proverbial saying- "We do not eat till we're hungry and when we eat we're never full"- is the basis on which he founded healthy living. For all their increasing skills and mounting numbers, physicians down the ages have not been able to come up with a better (medical) advice." Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb,* cit., p. 163.

and contentment. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "No calamity ever befalls a Muslim but God expiates some of his sins for it, be it even the prick of a thorn."[1] He also said: "No believer ever suffers anything, from the thorn prick up, but he is compensated for his pain by the reward of a good deed written down in his annuls and a sin of his effaced."[2] Similarly, The Prophet (pbuh) said: "No tiredness, fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt or distress ever befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick of a thorn, but God expiates some of his sins for it."[3]

Even if death is brought about by some illnesses, it is considered a form of martyrdom for which the deceased Muslim is rewarded. The Prophet said: "The Muslim who dies of the plague is a martyr."[4]

With all the goodness and mercy it engenders, the Muslim in fact should be rather pleased if he is stricken with a calamity like sickness or other. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "If God wishes good for somebody, He afflicts him with trials."[5]

Indeed the happy man is not he who dies without having suffered any illness in his life, because this deprives him of expiating his sins. Companions of the Prophet reported that a man died at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and one of them said: Lucky man! He died without having been afflicted by any kind of illness. "Woe is you!" the Prophet said, "and what if God afflicted him with an illness and abolished all his sins in the process?"[6]

Perhaps the ones who die without being afflicted with a calamity or an illness in their lives will deplore their bad luck in the hereafter. It is reported that the Prophet said: "On the Day of Judgment, when the afflicted people are rewarded for their

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5209; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4667.
(2) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4664.
(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5210; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 4670.
(4) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh,* Hadeeth no. 1545. He said it is "greed on."
(5) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 5213.
(6) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh,* Hadeeth no. 1578. He said it is "authentic."

suffering, the healthy people in this life wish their own skins were clipped with scissors."(1)

But doesn't illness prevent the patient form worshipping God in the usual way he is used to when healthy, Father Stephano asked? Doesn't it deprive him of the rewards for his worship?

In answer to this specific question, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "If the servant of God falls ill or travels abroad, the Lord writes down in his book of reckonings equal rewards to the good work he used to do when healthy and at home."(2) This is assuming that the illness totally incapacitates him and prevents him from performing the acts of worship altogether. If somehow he could perform them in any other way, they would be accepted from him. The Prophet (pbuh) mercifully taught the patient how to perform his religious duties. It is reported that a patient asked him how to conduct his praying. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Pray to God standing upright if you can, or sitting if you cannot, or even reclining on one side if you cannot do that either."(3)

Did Muhammad forge all these kinds of mercy grouped under this heading, Father Stephano asked somewhat amazed?

Almighty God had forged them rather, through Muhammad (pbuh) and at his hands. All those Hadeeths of the Prophet are merely details itemizing what was broadly outlined in such 'Quranic verses which state: "It is no righteousness that you turn your faces east and west (in prayer); the righteous is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Scripture and the Prophets; who gives his money, despite his love for it, to his kith and kin, to the orphans, the poor, the wayfarers, the beggars and who uses his money to set slaves free…"(4) They are also outlined in 'Quranic verses categorically instructing Muslims to "Feed the wretched poor;"(5) "Feed the beggar and_the suppliant;"(6)

(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1570. He said it is "fair."
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1544. He said it is "authentic."
(3) Al-Albani, *Irwa' Al-Ghaleel,* electronic copy, p. 299. He said it is "authentic."
(4) Al-Ba'karah: 177.
(5) Al-Hajj: 28.
(6) Al-Hajj: 36.

"Oppress not the orphan and repulse not the beggar."[1] Other 'Quranic verses say that the true believers should "Feed the needy, the orphan and the captive only for the love of God;"[2] that they tell the poor "We feed you only for the sake of God. We seek no rewards or thanks from you;"[3] that the pious are they who acknowledge "in their wealth the due share of the beggar and the outcast"[4]; that the faithful are they "in whose wealth there is an acknowledged right for the beggar and the deprived."[5]

They are outlined in such 'Quranic verses that describe the unbeliever as he who "denies the Faith… who shuns the orphan and encourages not the feeding of the needy."[6] They describe the unbeliever being tortured with Hell Fire on the Day of Judgment as he who "used not to believe in God Almighty and who failed to promote the feeding of the needy."[7] Those same unbelievers are depicted as stating the reason for which they went to Hell: "We used neither to pray nor feed the poor and destitute."[8]

Enough, Father Stephano said. The Verses and Hadeeths you have mentioned are sufficient to convince me of the validity of a statement I read in a book entitled *The Arabs*, where the Spanish orientalist Juan Lake says: "Muhammad proved that he had shown the greatest mercies and kindness to every weak and every person who needs help. Muhammad was mercy incarnate to the orphans, the poor, the wayfarers, the grief-stricken, the weak, the workers and the people who toiled and laboured."[9]

12. His Mercy in the Face of Death

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

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(1) Al-Dhu'ha: 9-10.
(2) Al-Insan: 8.
(3) Al-Insan: 9.
(4) Al-Thariat: 19.
(5) Al-M'arej: 24-25.
(6) Al-Ma'un: 1-3.
(7) Al-'Hak'ah: 33-34.
(8) Al-Muddath'er: 44-43
(9) Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., P. 43.

The Prophet (pbuh) taught students in his school to show mercy in the face of death. Usama bin Zaid reported that "The daughter of the Prophet (pbuh) sent for him saying: My child is dying, please come to us. The Prophet told the messenger to go back and tell her that the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; to Him belongs all He has granted. God set an appointed time for everything and everyone, so she should show endurance and seek reward from God Almighty. The messenger came back and said: She begs of him to come to her. He got up to go, accompanied by Sa'd bin 'Ubada, Mu'ath bin Jabal, Ubai bin Ka'ab, Zaid bin Thabet and others, and I also went along with them. The dying boy was lifted to the Prophet (pbuh) and his soul was restless inside his body as if imprisoned in an old waterskin. The Prophet's eyes welled up with tears (pbuh). (Surprised at the Prophet crying) Sa'd said: What is this, Messenger of God?! The Prophet (pbuh) replied: It is a mercy God has placed in the hearts of His servants, and God shows mercy to His merciful servants."[(1)]

Anas bin Malek also reported that "We went with God's Messenger (pbuh) to the blacksmith Abu Saif, the husband of the wet-nurse of Ibrahim (the son of the Prophet Muhammad). God's Prophet (pbuh) took Ibrahim and kissed him and sniffed at him. Later on we entered Abu Saif's house and at that time Ibrahim was in his last breath, and God's Prophet (pbuh) started shedding tears. 'Abdul Ra'hman bin 'Auf said: Even you weep, Prophet of God?!' He said: It is a mercy, Ibn 'Auf. He wept further and said: 'The eyes drop and the heart grieves, and we will say nothing but what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim! We are grieved to part with you."[(2)]

Companions of the Prophet (pbuh) reported that "The Godsend Messenger held his dying daughter and put her between his breasts and she gave her last breath there. Um Ayman, the attendant and nurse of the Prophet, cried out loud. She was told:

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1204; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 1531.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 1220.

Are you crying in the presence of the Prophet?! She said: I see you crying yourself, Prophet of God, aren't you?! It is not crying, he said. It is a God given mercy. The believer thanks the Lord in all events and in any case."(1)

Al-K'asem bin Muhammad reported that 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet (pbuh), said: "The Prophet (pbuh) kissed the dead Uthman bin Mathu'n and he was crying, or his eyes were dropping, she said."(2)

It is reported that one day the Prophet visited his mother's tomb with a group of people. He cried and made the people around him cry, then said: "I asked God's permission to visit my mother's grave and He granted me that. I asked His permission to pray for her forgiveness but He did not. So visit the graves (of your dearly departed), for they remind you of (the fact of) death."(3)

As visiting the graves inspires mercy and humility, softens the heart and evokes a sense of reverence and awe in the face of death, the Prophet said: "I had previously forbidden you to visit the graves, do visit them for they soften the heart, make the eyes weep and remind you of the hereafter. Do not say bad things about them (the dead)."(4)

This last statement, "Do not say bad things about them," I added, is a kind of mercy to the dead. It forbids sneering at or cursing the dead while visiting their graves!

How noble, father Stephano said!

Another form of showing mercy to the dead is mentioned in the Prophet's famous Hadeeth, reported by Ibn Abbas. He said: "The Prophet once passed by two graves and said: These two

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 1632.

(2) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dh'aif Sunan Al-Tirmithi,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 989. He said it is "authentic."

(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah Al-Sahihah,* 1/24, reported by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurairah.

(4) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dh'aif Al Jame' Al-Sagheer,* Hadeeth no. 8713. He said it is "authentic."

(dead) persons are being tortured but not for a major sin they had committed. One of them did not clean up after urination, while the other used to go about gossiping. The Prophet took a green palm leaf, split it in two and planted one on each grave. They said: Why have you done so, God's Prophet? He replied: I hope their punishment would lessen and abate before the leaf goes dry.'"[1]

This surely is mercy to the dead and a lesson to the living, Father Stephano said.

13. His Mercy with Women

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught students in his school to show mercy to women, I said.

You know that the greatest mercy a woman aspires to, I added, is to have her legitimate rights and achieve social justice.

What about equality with men, he asked?

Equality between men and women is a myth and a big lie, I said.

How come?

Well, you know it is impossible to achieve absolute parity between any two creatures, simply because the nature of God's creation is variety and difference. Not even our own fingerprints are the same.

Equality between men and women is as impossible in fact as equality between men and equality between women. For equality in essence means equal rights and equal duties, which itself is impossible. How on earth can the rights and duties of doctors be equal to the rights and duties of engineers, teachers, farmers and manual workers? The rights and duties of each and every man and woman of these are de facto proportionate to the social role

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[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 211.

assigned to him or her in this life. Necessarily, therefore, women have different rights and different duties from the different rights and different duties of men. It is a self-evident fact that no two sensible people should question. What reason and commonsense command is to achieve social justice for men and women.

Yes, you're right. This is indeed what men and women have always aspired to, albeit they have often been sidetracked and deflected by the hidden agendas of politicians and money dealers, along with their obedient servant, the media.

Listen to the 'Quranic verse taught to students in the school of Muhammad one thousand four hundred years ago: "To Muslim men and women, to believing men and women, to pious men and women, to true and honest men and women, to persevering men and women, to humble men and women, to charity-giving men and women, to fasting men and women, to chaste men and women, to men and women who constantly praise God- to all these the Lord has made ready absolution and great rewards to be accorded to them."(1)

Now do you see in this any unfairness or double standards in dealing with men and women? Doesn't each of them have rights proportionate to the duties s/he fulfills? Isn't this showing real mercy to men and women alike?

That's right, and it is precisely what the western woman spires to, and fails to achieve, in today's world.

Why can't she?

I don't know. I suppose things are so topsy-turvy today that we in the west are not really sure whether we've oppressed women or been fair to them.

No, I said. *Some* do know.

Tell me more, he said.

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[1] Al-Ahzab: 35.

In her book, *Muhammad*, the British theological scholar Karin Armstrong says: "It is not fair to accuse Muhammad and Islam of misogyny. If Muslim women today reject some of the freedoms we feel we have given them, the reason is not due to stubbornness but rather to the confused relations between the sexes and the muddled Western view of women. We claim to call for equality and for the liberation of women, yet we systematically demean women. We use and abuse our women in advertising, in pornography, in popular forms of exhibitionism, which Muslims find abhorrent and hurtful."[(1)]

[(1)] K. Armstrong, *Muhammad,* cit., p. 345. "Perhaps one of the ugliest tragedies inflicted on women by the call for women liberation in the West is bolting the door firmly against the idea of marriage. In their joint article, 'America: A Gangster State,' Jack Lipp and Lee Mortimer wrote: 'One residual effect of the absolute freedom Western women have obtained is the numerous economic and social crises arising in our modern life. In the forefront of these, and arguably the most dangerous, is that the American man has shunned the idea of marriage altogether, particularly to women claiming freedom and sexual liberation. The American man simply does not find such women fit to start a family and bring up children.

The already severe crisis of marriage has thus become more acute with a few more millions of single women. Now if we look deeper for the reason behind this social problem we find that the American man has started to look for the simplest and more direct ways to fulfill his sexual needs… Women are available in all the haunts he frequents… the club, the office, the bar, the restaurant, the beach, etc. He picks the woman he likes best and takes her as a mistress for a while without having to put up with the expenses and demands incurred. University and college girls have started to compete with barmaids, waitresses… and prostitutes! And the ordinary American man prefers this kind of woman…

In our travels across the States, we observed that the official bordellos have become noticeably fewer. Some might think virtue has overcome vice in our country! The painful truth however is the exact opposite. Bordellos are driven out of business by the severe competition they face from students, pleasure girls and freelance, unofficial prostitutes.

More modern ways and means have appeared in the last few years to accommodate the needed speed and sophistication of our atomic age. 'Quickie' road-girls, travel-girls and escort girls can now be contacted easily on accessible and widely advertised phone numbers.

In large American cities, Chicago for instance, well established gangs run the lucrative "business" of these escort girls. From well-established offices all over the city they provide their services to all kinds of customers, with gangsters roaming America from end to end to find beautiful saleswomen and lure them with flashy cars, luxury houses and hotels and all kinds of drinks and drugs to satisfy the increasingly sophisticated tastes of their clients.

Vice Squads and FBI campaigns to control this kind of white slavery have so far failed. Business is booming for these escort girls and state-of-the-art prostitutes. The

Yes, Father Stephano said, as if trying to get himself out of a tight spot. Won't you tell me about showing mercy to women in the school of Muhammad?

Sure, but tell me, Father Stephano, do you know who to the Prophet (pbuh) is the best Muslim?

No, who?

The Prophet (pbuh) addressed all men of the Islamic nation when he said: "The best of you (men) are the best to women."(1) On another occasion he said: "The best among you are those who treat their women best."(2) Now, you tell me, is this mercy and kindness or cruelty and harshness to women?

Mercy and kindness, Father Stephano said.

Do you know who the Prophet (pbuh) commended Muslim men to be kind to?

No, he said.

Women, I said. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "I commend women (to you). Take good care of women."(3) Is that mercy or cruelty to women?

Mercy and compassion, he said.

And do you know the nearest of people to the Prophet's heart?

No, you tell me, he said.

The Prophet saw women and children returning from a wedding party and rushing forward to see him. He stood up to receive them and said: By God, you are the people I love most,

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police cannot do anything to put an end to their obscenities and wantonness: they are simply not empowered to intervene." (Trans. Habeeb Nahuli, p. 26.)

(1) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dh'aif Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer,* Hadeeth no. 5627. He said it is "authentic." See also his *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 285, and *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 1925.

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha,* Hadeeth no. 284.

(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1997.

and he repeated it three times."[1] Again, is this showing mercy or cruelty to women?

Again, mercy and kindness, he said.

And do you know the best asset a Muslim can have in the school of Muhammad?

No, he said.

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "This whole world is about what one has, and the best asset one can have in this world is the good, pious woman."[2] Is this mercy or cruelty to women?

Mercy and kindness, he said.

Would the Prophet (pbuh) have given all these commands to care for women had he regarded them as trash, as he is often accused of in the west?

No, he said.

The woman is rather the cornerstone of the human edifice Muhammad (pbuh) had built, I said. His God Almighty had taught him that the woman is the mother, the daughter, the aunt and the sister of man. No wonder Almighty God commanded Muhammad (pbuh) to treat women well. He said: "God commands you to be good to women, God commands you to be good to women, for they are your mothers, daughters and aunts."[3]

The Prophet (pbuh) was well aware of the chronic hatred for women in general, and for the new born baby girl in particular, in the Jahilite society. He made it his primary concern to change this attitude and replace it with a loving and merciful outlook. "Do not detest girls," he said; "they are your amiable and companionable darlings."[4]

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 3501.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2268.
(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2871.
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no, 3206.

As always, he set himself as an example. He took good care of the four girls God had granted him and they remained his dear and intimate companions throughout his life. He was always a loving father and remained concerned about them even after they married and joined their husbands.

He set about changing his people's attitudes to newborn baby girls, showing them that they are a source of good fortune to their parents. He said: "Whoever brings up three girls, provides for them, treats them kindly and shows mercy to them, he is in Heaven."[1] And in Islam, you know, Heaven is reached only by those who labour and work hard for it.

He also said: "No Muslim brings up his two daughters till they become of age, treats them well and kindly as long as they are in his company, or he in theirs, but they will usher him to Paradise."[2]

The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said: "Whoever has three daughters and he showed perseverance in bringing them up, feeding and clothing them from his own honest labour, they will be his veil from Hell Fire on the Day of Resurrection."[3] In Islam, one has also to remember, no one is veiled from Hell Fire except he who wins God's mercy and grace.

On another occasion he said: "Whoever brings up two or three daughters, two or three sisters, till they become of age or he dies before that, he and I will be as close as these, and he pointed with his index and middle fingers."[4]

The Prophet (pbuh), I added, was an example for people to follow in all he said. He gave top priority to educating women so that they'd know their rights and duties and thus avail themselves of the ample benefits and blessings Islam had conferred upon them. The Muslim women used to meet with the Prophet (pbuh) regularly and he used to teach them and explain Islam to them.

(1) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2492.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2776.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 294.
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 296.

Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari reported that "Some women told the Prophet (pbuh): "The men are getting the better deal as they are taking up all your time. Set aside an appointed day for us to meet, Prophet of God, the women said. The Prophet (pbuh) promised them to and he did meet with them regularly on that day."(1) His wife 'A'isha praised those women for seeking knowledge and said: "Blessed are the Ansari women. Their modesty did not prevent them from seeking in-depth knowledge of their (Islamic) Faith."(2)

Other women came to the Prophet individually, asking to know their rights and telling him bout their problems. Al-Khanssa' bint Khutham Al-Ansariah said that "Her father married her off against her will and she was a matron. She resented that and told the Prophet about it and he revoked her marriage."(3)

Ibn 'Abas reported that "a virgin bondmaid came to the Prophet (pbuh) and told him that her father married her off against her wish. The Prophet gave her the choice (between divorcing her husband and staying with him)."(4)

Since marriage is one of the most important events in a woman's life, the Prophet (pbuh) made sure that she has full control in matters pertaining to wedlock. Whether virgin or not, he took the right of decision from her guardians and gave it wholly to her, and he instructed that no one should deprive her of that right. He said: "The matron knows better than her guardian what is best for her. The virgin on the other hand is consulted and asked (to give or withhold her consent in marriage). But, Prophet of God, it was said, the virgin is too shy to speak her mind. He said: Her silence is (the indication of) her consent, then."(5)

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 99.
(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 127.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 6432.
(4) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dh'aif Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadeeth no. 1875. He said it "authentic."
(5) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1870. He said it is "authentic."

'A'isha (rAa) reported that she once said: "Prophet of God, should women's consent be asked in marriage? Yes, he said. But when the virgin is consulted she is too shy to speak her mind and she keeps silent. Her silence is her consent, he said."[1]

Another woman came to the Prophet and complained: "This is my son. My womb was a home (receptacle) for him, my breasts his drinking fountain, my lap his dwelling place. His father divorced me and now he wants to take the boy away from me. You have more right to him than his father, said the Prophet (pbuh), unless you remarry."[2]

This way, I said, Muslim women learnt about each and every one of their rights at the hands of the Prophet of mercy who was much more compassionate and kind to them than their own family and people.

So, the American orientalist Snichs was right after all, Father Stephano said. He stated that "Muhammad made it imperative to protect women by acknowledging their rights."[3] I fully agree with him now, but tell me, did Muhammad show this mercy to his own women? Did he give them the same rights he advocated for other women in his school?

Would you like to know what Muhammad (pbuh) was like at home, I asked?

Yes, he said.

One Companion of the Prophet asked his wife 'A'isha the same question: "What did the Prophet do at home? 'A'isha said: 'He was a human being and like other men… he milked his goat and went about serving himself by himself."[4]

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 6433.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 368. He said it is "fair."
(3) Quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb,* cit. p. 42.
(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 635.

Another man asked her the same question and she said: "He helped his family about the house, and when prayer time was due he went out to pray."[1]

She was asked the question a third time and she said: "The Prophet (pbuh) sewed his garment, repaired his shoes, and did what men usually do in their homes."[2]

Karin Armstrong, the British theological scholar, testified to this in her book *Muhammad*. She said: "Muhammad always helped his wives about the house. He relied on himself in all his personal matters. He sewed and patched his clothes, repaired his shoes and tended his goat. He tried to teach Muslims by example, to educate them into showing more respect for women. The fact that people kept up the traditions he instituted for them is sufficient proof that they had fully accepted his Mission. This is particularly important because it happened at a time when most people in most religions denounced the attention a great prophet gave to housework."[3] Now I am convinced of the validity of her testimony.

As for his justice and fairness with his wives, it was a course of action from which he never swerved, whether he was travelling or staying in. He stayed one night with each wife when he was in town, showing enough mercy as to avoid the usual jealousy between fellow wives.

Anas bin Malek, the Prophet's attendant and friend, said: "The Prophet had nine wives and he was just in dividing his time among them, never returning to the first except on the ninth day."[4]

When he travelled too he showed no preference for one over the others. He drew lots to keep them all contented. His wife 'A'isha said: "When the Prophet wanted to go on a journey, he

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(1) Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dh'aif Al-Jame' Al-Sagheer,* Hadeeth no. 9068. He said it is "authentic."

(2) K. Armstrong, *Muhammad,* cit. p. 355.

(3) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 2656.

(4) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 2656.

used to draw lots so as to decide which one of his wives would accompany him. He always took the woman whose arrow cropped up."[1]

His kindness to women was such that the Prophet (pbuh) laboured to teach men the codes of apt behaviour with women. His attendant and friend Anas bin Malek said: "It is *sunnah* that when a man, already married to a matron, marries a virgin second wife he should stay with her for seven consecutive days; but if a man, already married to a virgin, marries a matron second wife, he should stay with her only for three consecutive days."[2]

Even in this the Prophet (pbuh) endeavoured to be fair with his wives. It is reported by his wife Um Salama, and she was a matron when he married her, said that the prophet stayed with her for three consecutive days. He told her: "Your husband does not mean you any disrespect. If you wish I could stay with you for a week, but in that case I would have to stay for a week with all my other wives."[3]

Further, in teaching men to be fair to their wives, the Prophet (pbuh) forbade them to show partiality to one wife over the other. He said: "Whoever had two wives and was partial to one of them, he would come back to life on the Day of Resurrection half debilitated."[4]

His mercy, compassion and kindness to women were such that the Prophet (pbuh) used to instruct men not to do things that their wives hated so as not to hurt their feelings. He said addressing the husband: "Don't slap a woman on the face, say 'damn you' or desert her except at home (by refusing to share her bed)."[5]

Part of his mercy towards women was manifest in sparing them the kind of hard work he used to encourage men to do,

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2666.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2654.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2650.
(4) Al-Albani, *Mukhtasar Irwa' Al-Ghaleel*, Hadeeth no. 2017.
(5) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2033.

particularly Jihad. Some women wanted to take part in the battles Muslims fought in God's Cause, and they expressed their wish to the Prophet but he refused. His wife 'A'isha said: "I asked the Prophet's permission to take part in Jihad but he said: Your Jihad is Al-Hajj."(1)

In another version, she said: "The Prophet was asked by his wives about the Jihad and he replied: 'The best Jihad (for you) is Al-Hajj.'"(2)

Travelling was particularly strenuous for women in the days of the Prophet. That is why he taught people in his school that "A woman should not travel for more than three days except with a *mu'hram* (i.e. her husband or another male member she cannot legally marry, like her brother, father, grandfather, etc.)."(3) It was an attempt to spare women the hardship involved in travelling at that time- and the travel risks entailed these days with the spreading of all kinds of corruption and corruptors of women the world over, white slave traders included. It was a kind of mercy to women, because the *mu'hram* was not there only to keep her company but primarily to help the woman, protect her and spare her the dangers on the way. The Prophet (pbuh) had thus safeguarded the rights of the Muslim woman to travel with comfort and dignity and return safe and unsullied.

Muhammad (pbuh) loved the woman as a mother, daughter, relative as well as a wife- practically in all multiple and diverse functions she fulfills in life. He showed her as much mercy and kindness as he could. When travelling, he often ordered the camel driver to slow down in order not to disturb the riding women and keep them safe and secure throughout their trip.4 Anas bin Malek

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2663.

(2) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 2664.

(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 1024.

(4) *Al-howdah* was the most common and comfortable means of transport and travel for women at that time. It was placed on the back of the camel and the cameleer or camel driver led the way. Every caravan had its cameleer who used to sing to spur the camels on. Anjashah was the Prophet's cameleer, who was known for his singing which drove Camels fast. Obviously when camels run very fast they caused discomfort to the women in *al-howdah*, hence the Prophet's insistence to slow the camel's pace.

reported that Um Sulaim was going on a trip with the Prophet's women, led by a camel driver called Anjashah. "Go easy, Anjashah," the Prophet used to tell him. "Slow down (your camel) with the dainty ladies onboard."(1)

Out of this love, mercy and compassion for women, the Prophet (pbuh) set about encouraging men to follow his example in dealing kindly with women. He said: "The best of you is the best to his household, and I am the best of you to mine."(2)

He encouraged husbands and wives to overlook each other's failings and not to bear grudges or find fault with one another. The husband should disregard the foibles and weaknesses in his wife's character and focus on her strong points, so that animosity between them is replaced by mutual intimacy and love. "No believer should ever wholly despise his believer spouse," he said. If he is unhappy with one aspect of her character he is bound to find other aspects that please him."(3)

That'll do, Father Stephano said. I've heard enough to confirm what William Muir said in *The Life of Muhammad*. "Muhammad was a real mercy to womankind," the western orientalist wrote: "Before him women were only objects and possessions the whole world over."(4) I would go further to add that women will never find a more merciful liberator than Muhammad, now and in times to come.

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4289.

(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 285, reported in the context of Hadeeths about women.

(3) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 2672.

(4) As quoted by Muhammad Fahmi Abdulwahab, *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., p. 46. The French orientalist Emil Dremenghem wrote in *The Life of Muhammad*: "Muhammad's Islamic call achieved unhindered and irreversible progress in the whole of Arabia, whether inside the family circle, the social circle or in relation to public health. The status of women markedly improved; vice, temporary marriages and illegal sexual relations (adultery) were banned. Forced prostitution common to the former Jahilite society, where slave women were turned into whores and pleasure women, selling sexual favours to make their masters rich, was also banned." "Furthermore," Dremenghem added, "Muhammad was the first to ban the separation between captive mothers and their children." (*The Life of Mahomet*, cit., p. 46.)

How can you say that and the western media never stops talking about women's rights, the emancipation of women and so on and so forth?

After a moment's reflection Father Stephano said: Do you know what is really meant by women's rights and the emancipation of women we call for in the West?

You tell me.

If you seriously study the present situation of the western woman, he said, if you get to know the real world she lives in, away from all the phony gloss of the media, you'll find that the only right she has won herself in the western world and in western civilization is only the right to take her clothes off and go stark naked in public. In fact the larger the portion she exhibits of her private parts the better, and the more applauded she is by the western media! Look how liberated our women are, the implied media message often goes, how many rights she has won for herself!

Woe to her however if the woman decided to retain her decency and self respect, Father Stephano added. Woe to her if she refused to flash her genitalia in public. The western media would spare no effort to accuse her of being backward, inhibited, conservative, fundamentalist, averse to progress and civilization. It is as if baring her private parts is the rubric of sophistication, progress, civilization and women liberation in the west!

But your media always boasts about western women achieving the highest levels of education and reaching the highest public offices, etc.

So what, he said? Suppose women have really achieved the highest levels of education, suppose there are hundreds, thousands if you will, of women PhD holders today, what good did that do the millions of other women who obtained no such prestigious degrees? The ones who did have them have merely joined the old aristocratic elites, leaving hundreds of millions of other women the way they have always been down the ages-

labouring desperately by all ways and means to earn their living and make ends meet.

As for women reaching the highest public offices, one would like to ask how many? How many women have actually "made it"? Not more than dozens, even hundreds. So what? What good did that do the millions of other women who did not make it to such high offices?

Now if you tell me they have their own women MPs who defend their rights in parliaments, I'd say that all those parliaments and representative bodies are nothing but a political ploy, a trick of the trade, devised by financiers and money makers. The so called democratic objective has always been to sidetrack people- ordinary men and women- with never ending voting and elections so as to keep them away from competing with financiers and money makers for the sources of wealth in their countries. If you study the reality of the western systems of governance, you'll find behind each and everyone of them some secret hand pulling the strings behind the scenes, directing politicians the way it wills. From the military complex to the oil and atomic industries, monetary and financial institutions have always had the upper hand. That is why the active roles in parliaments and representative bodies are played only by those who came through the money houses and the business world. The others are there to complete the jigsaw, nothing more nothing less.

I shall not comment on what you said, Father Stephano, I added. Perhaps you are better placed to know better.

14. His Mercy in Administering Punishments

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school anyway, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to be merciful in administering punishment.

What punishment, he asked?

The punishment outlined in the Islamic *Shari'a* Laws, against perpetrators of crimes and offenses that damage the welfare of the Islamic community, like adultery, theft, drinking alcohol, etc.

But this can be done by any person in authority who might acquit the offenders, either as a merciful gesture towards them or for some other reason he finds fit.

Hold on, Father Stephano, I said. The person of authority might pardon the offender who wishes to be reprieved, not the offender who seeks his own punishment.

And is there an offender who wishes to receive punishment, he wondered.

Yes, I said. Such were the students in Muhammad's school.

Tell me more, then.

I will, I said, listen. Buraidah, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), reported that a man called "Ma'ez bin Malek Al-Aslami came to God's Messenger (pbuh) and said: I have wronged myself; purge me of my sin. The Prophet (pbuh) turned him away saying, woe is you! Go back and pray God to forgive you. The following day Ma'ez came to the Prophet again and said: I have committed a carnal sin. Purge me, God's Messenger. Again the Prophet (pbuh) turned him away. The fourth time the man came and the Prophet asked him: What shall I purge you of? Of the sin of adultery, the man said. Is he insane, the Prophet (pbuh) asked his companions? No, he was told. Is he drunk, the Prophet asked again? A man sniffed at him and found no smell of alcohol. The Prophet (pbuh) asked: Did you fornicate, the Prophet asked? Yes, the man answered. The Prophet then gave his orders and the man was stoned.

The people were divided among themselves, some said Ma'ez is ruined and damned for good with his sin; others said there is no better act of repentance than Ma'ez's- he came of his own accord, put his hand in the Prophet's hand and told him fair and square: Stone me, for I have sinned. The two groups kept arguing for two, three days. The Prophet (pbuh) came to them while they

were sitting debating the issue. He greeted them and sat down. Pray God to forgive Ma'ez bin Malek, the Prophet said, so the people did. The Prophet (pbuh) added: He made such a staggering act of repentance that would have absolved a whole nation.

The narrator said: Then a Ghamedi woman from the Uzd tribe came to the Prophet (pbuh). Godsend Messenger, she said, purge me of my sin. The Prophet turned her away, saying: Woe is you! Go back, pray God to forgive you and repent. The following day she came to the Prophet again and said: Godsend Messenger, I see you are trying to turn me away like you turned Ma'ez bin Malek away. Why, what's it to you, he said? She said she was pregnant. Was it you (Mu'az committed adultery with), the Prophet (pbuh) asked? Yes, the woman said. Wait till you deliver the child you carry, the Prophet said. An Ansari man vouchsafed to be responsible for her till she delivers the baby. When she gave birth she came back to the Prophet with the child in swaddles. Here is the child I have delivered, she said. We shall not stone her and let the baby starve with no one to feed him, the Prophet said. Go and suckle the baby until he is weaned. When she weaned the baby, she came to the Prophet with the child holding a piece of bread in his hand. She said: Godsend Prophet, here he is. I have weaned him and he can eat now. The Prophet entrusted the child to one of the Muslims then pronounced the punishment of stoning."[1]

What do you say, Father Stephano, I asked? Was the Prophet merciful in administering her punishment?

The anecdote confirms the validity of what you had said earlier: Muhammad was more merciful with Muslims than they were with themselves. But was this a one off incident or was it a repeated pattern? Did it happen again?

Yes, I said. The companion of the Prophet, Abu Hurairah, reported that "A man came to the Prophet (pbuh) in the mosque

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3207. See also Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 3565, which includes added material.

and told him: Godsend Messenger, I have committed adultery. The Prophet turned his face to the other side. The man moved to the side towards which the Prophet had turned his face and said: Godsend Messenger, I have committed adultery. The Prophet turned his face from him to the other side again, but the man moved to that side again and repeated his statement. The Prophet turned his face from him to the other side for the fourth time. The man moved again to the same side and repeated his statement for the fourth time. When the man gave witness four times against himself, the Prophet called him and said: Are you insane, the Prophet asked? No, Prophet of God, the man replied. Are you married, the Prophet asked? Yes, Prophet of God, the man answered. Well, then, the Prophet said, take him and stone him."[1]

Enough or do you want more examples, I asked?

I suppose there is nothing more revealing and eloquent, father Stephano said.

There *is* actually. The companion of the Prophet Anas bin Malek reported that "While I was with the Prophet in the mosque, a man came up to him and said: Godsend Messenger, I have committed a legally punishable sin; inflict the due punishment on me. The Prophet did not ask what he had done. When the time for prayer was due the man prayed along with the Prophet. After the Prophet finished his prayer, the man got up again and said: Godsend Messenger, I have committed a legally punishable sin; inflict the due punishment on me according to God's Laws. The Prophet asked: Didn't you pray with us? Yes, the man answered. The Prophet said: Then God has absolved you of your sin.'"[2]

You noticed how the Prophet (pbuh) saved the man from capital punishment by not asking him about the sin he had come to confess. He was merciful with the man when he was sure of his remorse and willingness to repent. Had he asked him about

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 6325; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 3202.
(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 6323.

the nature of his sin and the man confessed to it, he would have been liable to the designate punishment.

This had always been the case with the Prophet in administering punishment for this and similar crimes.

What is admirable in what you tell me about Muhammad's mercy is that it was not an anecdotal, one off occurrence but always conspicuous, reiterative and boundless. It seems to be that whoever studies the character of Muhammad seriously could distill sample examples of mercy anyway he wished.

Because his mercy (pbuh) was not affected but genuinely innate, humane and congenital, I said.

Hard as he could, he had always endeavoured to avert the administration of punishment in all other serious and legally binding crimes, so long as he remained within the boundaries of Almighty God's *Shari'a* Laws. He was equally merciful in administering punishments for other offenses which are legally unbinding.

What are those?

Crimes with no specific punishments outlined in the penal laws of Islamic *Shari'a*. They are left for the Muslim authorities to assess how serious they are and to administer the due penalties according to the situation and the available circumstantial evidence.[1]

Could you explain further?

Perhaps an example would help. 'Hateb bin Abi Batla'a was an ally of 'Quraish, living in Makkah. When the Divine Revelation was disclosed to the Prophet (pbuh), 'Hateb converted to Islam and emigrated to Al-Madina with other Muslims, leaving his household behind in Makkah. The Prophet decided to embark on the Conquest of Makkah in the eighth year of Hijrah, and he imposed strict rules of secrecy on military preparations so as to take 'Quraish by surprise. Just before the Islamic army moved

[1] See Ibn Taimiah, *Al-Siasah Al-Shar'ia*, Damascus: Dar Al-M'arifa, p. 95.

from Al-Madina, and as Ali bin Abi T'aleb reported, "God's Prophet (pbuh) sent me, along with Al-Zubair and Al-Miqdad, saying: Proceed till you reach Rawdhat Khakh (a place on the way to Makkah). There you will find a woman with a letter in her possession. Take the letter from her. So we set out, our horses running at full speed till we got to Al-Rawdhah where we found the woman and said: Hand over the letter. I have no letter with me, she replied. We said, either you take out the letter or we will take off your clothes and find it. She took it out of her braid and handed it over to us. We brought the letter to God's Prophet and it contained a statement from 'Hateb bin Abi Balta'a to some of Makkah's polytheists, telling them things about the Prophet (in another version of the Hadeeth, informing them about the Prophet's intention to march on Makkah). What is this, 'Hateb, the Prophet said to the man? Please don't jump to conclusions and misjudge me, Prophet of God, Hateb replied. I am closely connected to 'Quraish, but I do not belong to that tribe, whereas the other emigrants with you have their relatives in Makkah to protect their dependents and property. I wanted to make up for my lack of blood relations with them by doing them a favor so that they might protect my dependents. I did this neither out of apostasy nor out of preferring disbelief to Islam. The Godsend Prophet said, 'Hatib told you the truth.' (In another version of the Hadeeth, 'he told the truth, so don't hurt him by word or deed.') Omar said, let me chop off the head of this hypocrite, Godsend Messenger. No, the Prophet said, 'Hateb took part in the battle of Badr, and who knows, perhaps God has already looked at the Badr warriors and said: Do whatever you like, for I have forgiven you all (In another version of the Hadeeth, 'Paradise to you is a must. Omar's eyes watered and he said: God and His Prophet know better.')."(1)

If this were to happen with anyone other than Muhammad, Father Stephano said commenting on the incident, 'Hateb would

(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeths no. 3939 & 5789.

be denounced as a spy, accused of high treason and most likely shot on the spot.

Yes, Muhammad (pbuh) wouldn't have killed his companions, I said. He took the longer view of correcting their errors most mercifully and wisely, so that they'd become firmer in their faith and more loving to both God and His Prophet.

15. His Mercy with People of Other Faiths

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Godsend Prophet (pbuh) taught students in his school to show mercy to people of other faiths.

The first thing that attracts the attention here is the well known document frequently cited in numerous accounts of the Prophet's *sirah* and in books of Islamic history. It is practically the first policy document Islam and the Prophet (pbuh) released in the early days of the emigration from Makkah to Al-Madenah.(1) It is presented in the form of an agreement the Prophet made between a group of emigrant and Ansari Muslims on the one hand, and between them and the Jews of Al-Madinah on the other. The articles of the treaty relevant to the Jews are the following:

1. The Jews of Bani 'Ouf are a group of people who believe in God. They have their own religion and the Muslims have theirs. Each party has the right to free worship and is guaranteed peace and security for its members, their households, their followers and their servants and bondspersons, with the exception of those individuals who commit acts of aggression and wrongdoing thereby bringing destruction only to themselves and to their households.
2. The Jews of Bani Al-Najjar have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf.
3. The Jews of Bani Hareth have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf.
4. The Jews of Bani Sa'idah have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf.

(1) See Muhammad Hameedullah, *Majmu'at Al-Wathai'k Al-Siasiah Lil-'Ahd Al-Nabawi wa Al-Khilafah Al-Rashidah*, Beiruth: Dar Al-Nafa'is, 2001, p. 94.

5. The Jews of Bani Jasham have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf.
6. The Jews of Bani Ous have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf.
7. The Jews of Bani Tha'labah have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf, except those (it needs be reiterated) who commit acts of aggression and wrongdoing thereby bringing destruction only to themselves and their households.
8. The Jews of Bani Shut'aibah have the same rights as the Jews of Bani 'Ouf. Good will and benevolence have the upper hand over aggression and sinful behaviour.
9. The attendants and camp followers of the Jews have the same rights as the Jews themselves.
10. The Jews are responsible for their own expenditure and Muslims are responsible for theirs. Both parties are obliged to provide all help and support necessary to bring about victory over whoever fights against signatories to this treaty. Both parties are also obliged to provide good counsel and advice to each other. Good will and benevolence have the upper hand over aggression and sinful behaviour.
11. The Aws Jews, their camp followers and they themselves, have the same rights and obligations as the signatories to this treaty. Perfect good will and benevolence are extended from both parties signatories to this treaty....[1]

Now do you see any oppression or unfairness to the Jews in this agreement, I asked?

No, he said. Nothing but equality between the two parties.

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(1) Ibid., Document 1. See also Al-Albani view of the authenticity of this document in *Difa' 'an Al-Hadeeth Al-Nabawi wa Al-Sirah, electronic copy*.

Well, if somebody treats you as equal to himself, is he being cruel or merciful to you?

Merciful rather, said Father Stephano.

Narratives of the Prophet's life and books of Islamic history mention another agreement the Prophet made with a delegation of Yemen's Najran Christians. The treaty states the following:

"In the Name of God, the All Compassionate and Most Merciful.

The following is what the Prophet Muhammad, the Godsend Messenger, has agreed to bequeath to the people of Najran in writing…

Najran and its surrounding areas are entitled to the good neighbourly relations Almighty God had ordained, and the guarantee of His Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, to ensure the safety and security of their inhabitants, in themselves, their wealth, their faith, their people (present and absent alike), their tribes, their churches, their buying and selling and everything under their hands, great or small. The Prophet vows not to replace any of their bishops, monks or priests in their respective parish posts. The people of Najran are liable to no usurious payments and no blood money from prior, Jahiliah times; they shall not be drafted in the army, are not subject to pay the tenth of their income in taxes, and there will be no army stationed in their territories. Whoever amongst them demands a right of his, he shall be treated with justice and fairness, being neither oppressor nor oppressed."[(1)]

Do you see in this treaty any injustice done to Christians, I added?

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(1) Ibid., Document no. 94. It should be noted that the Hadeeth cited in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (no. 409, beginning with "Al-'A'keb and Al-Said, the rulers of Najran, came to the Godsend Prophet…") and in *Sahih Muslim* (serial no. 4444, beginning with "The people of Najran came to the Godsend Prophet…") do not include the details cited in this document. See Al-Albani's view of the authenticity of this document in his *Difa' 'an Al-Hadeeth Al-Nabawi wa Al-Sirah*.

No, he said. I see only justice, compassion and mercy- "neither oppressed nor oppressors."

History books and the accounts of the Prophet's *sirah* tell us about yet another treaty held between the Prophet (pbuh) and the Bishop of Najran. The document reads:

"In the Name of God, the All Compassionate and Most Merciful.

From the Prophet Muhammad to the Bishop Abi Al-Hareth Bin 'Alk'ama and other bishops, priests and monks of Najran and their followers: We hereby acknowledge their right to everything under their hands, great or small, whether churches, monasteries or places of worship and prayer. We offer them God's and His Prophet's vows of good neighbourly relations, and the promise not to replace any of their bishops, monks or priests, revoke any of their rights and powers, or change anything they have been used to doing. That is what God and His Prophet have enshrined for ever as the rights of neighbours, long as they live peacefully and justly, being neither oppressed nor oppressors."(1)

Do you find in these documents mercy or harshness with peoples of other faiths, I asked?

Nothing but mercy and justice, he said.

Narratives of the Prophet's life tell us more about the delegation of Najran Christians, I added.

Like what, he asked?

The earliest authentic narrative we have states the following:

"A delegation of Najran Christians came to the Prophet in sixty horsemen. Fourteen of them were their elders and noblemen, and three were the chieftains in charge:

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(1) Ibid., Document no. 95. The verdict on the authenticity of this document is probably similar to the previous one.

-Al-A'keb, called Abdul Masseh (the servant of Jesus the Messiah), their prince and counselor whose judgment they all obey;

-Al-Sayyed, called Al-Ayham, their commander and the manager of their affairs, the speaker of their assembly and the head of their convoy; and

-Abu Harithah Bin 'Alk'amah, one of Bakr bin Wai'l's sons, their bishop, pontiff, imam and principal of their (religious) schools.

When they came to the Prophet (pbuh), they entered the mosque while he was conducting the afternoon (*Al-Asr*) prayer. The companions of the Prophet who saw them that day said they had never seen such a majestic and awe-inspiring delegation. When it was time for their prayer, they stood up and wanted to pray in the mosque. Let them pray, the Prophet (pbuh) told his followers. So they faced east and prayed."[1]

Father Stephano, I said, where did the delegation of Najran Christians pray?

Inside Muhammad's mosque.

Were they of the same faith?

No, he said.

What date was this?

The seventh century AD, he said.

I suppose you are well aware that, towards the end of the twentieth century, the priests of St Catherine Monastery in Sinai, a group of Roman Orthodox Christians, refused to give permission to the Pope of the Vatican, the Catholic Pontiff John

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[1] Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah,* cit., pp. 485-87. In Al-Baiha'ki's *Dalai'l Al-Nubuwah* it is cited: "They stood to pray in the Prophet's own mosque and people wanted to prevent them. Let them pray, the Prophet (pbuh) said, so they faced east and prayed." (5/382.)

Paul II, to pray in their monastery when he visited the place in February 2000. In their view, he was not a believer![1]

Now was the Prophet (pbuh) comparatively merciful or harsh with the people of other faiths?

I have said before, I compare Muhammad only to prophets, Father Stephano replied.

The orientalist Thomas Arnold was right, he added, when he said in *The Call to Islam*: "Muslims treated Arab Christians with great tolerance from the very first century of Hijrah; and this tolerant treatment has continued throughout successive centuries. As for those Christian tribes who adopted Islam, they did so freely. Arab Christians living among Muslims today are another proof of Islam's tolerance."[2]

How wonderful is the true testimony to the truth!

Can I ask you something?

Anything you want, Father Stephano replied.

If a group of Christians or Jews were sitting around somewhere and a Muslim funeral procession passed by, what would they do?

Forgive me for not giving a categorical answer, Father Stephano said after some reflection.

A hint would do, I said.

Let's say they wouldn't pay much attention, Father Stephano said, again after some reflection.

Ah but the Prophet (pbuh) paid an awful lot of attention to any funeral procession passing, regardless to which faith the deceased belonged. Jaber bin Abdullah reported that "A funeral procession passed by us and the Prophet stood up in respect, and

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(1) See Dr Muhammad 'Amarah, *Islam and the Other,* Cairo: Al-Shurook Bookshop, 2001, p. 7.

(2) Thomas Arnold, *The Call to Islam,* Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahdha Al-Arabiah, 1957, p. 73.

so we stood with him. But it is a Jewish funeral, Godsend Messenger, we said. Whenever you see a funeral procession stand up in respect, regardless, he said."(1)

It was also reported that a funeral procession passed by the Prophet (pbuh) and again he stood up in respect. It was said: "But it is the funeral of a Jew, Godsend Messenger! So what, the Prophet said? Isn't it a human soul (that died)?"(2)

The two companions of the Prophet, Sahl bin Hunaif and Kais bin Sa'd, reported that they were sitting in a place called Al-'Qadissiah and a funeral procession passed by them and they stood up in reverence. They were told: "It is the funeral of a *themi* (a Christian or Jew living under the protection of Muslims). They said: A funeral passed by the Prophet (pbuh) and he stood up in respect. It was said: But it is the funeral procession of a Jew and the Prophet said: so what? Isn't it a human soul?"(3)

What does that tell you about the teacher and the students in Muhammad's school?

Blessed teacher and students, by God, so they were, Father Stephano said.

The Prophet (pbuh) was tolerant with people of other faiths on the personal level as well. The companion of the Prophet Jaber bin Abdullah reported that "A Jewish woman of the people of Khaiber offered the Prophet (pbuh) a poisoned roast goat as a gift. The Prophet took the shoulder and ate a bit of it and a group of his companions ate with him. The Prophet ordered his companions to stop eating. He summoned the Jewish woman and told her: Have you poisoned this goat? Who told you, the woman asked? This bit in my hand (the shoulder of the goat) told

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(1) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1228.

(2) Al-Albani, *Ghayat Al-Maram*, electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 475. He said it is reported by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Nisai'. Al-Albani adds: "NB. This Hadeeth is abrogated by subsequent authentic Hadeeths cited in my book *Ahkam Al-Janaez and Bida'ha*." The following Hadeeth in Al-Bukhari however states that some Companions of the Prophet abided by it and reported it still after the death of the Prophet (pbuh).

(3) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 1229.

me. She said: Yes. Why, the Prophet asked? I said to myself, the Jewish woman replied, if he was a real prophet it would not do him any harm, and if he wasn't, well, a good riddance. The Prophet let her off and did not punish her."[1]

Thus the Prophet (pbuh) endeavoured to teach Muslims in his school to forgive people of other faiths, even if they harmed Muslims, which is in line with the 'Quranic verse that says: "Many People of the Scriptures, out of sheer selfish envy, would like_to turn you back to infidelity after you have believed, and after the Truth have become manifest to them. Forgive and forbear (Muhammad) until God gives His command."[2] The companion of the Prophet Usama bin Zaid said: "The Prophet (pbuh) and his companions used to forgive pagan polytheists and people of the Scriptures and put up with their harm, as God had instructed them, then he read that 'Quranic verse."[3]

I must say I have read quite a bit in history books about the status of non-Muslims in the Islamic state when it was at the apex of its glory and civilization, Father Stephano said. I've found that Jews and Christians were so well treated that they preferred to live among Muslims than with the people of their own faith.[4] They were given countless rights, including the right to reach the highest public offices in the Islamic state. If only we, western people, would do the same today, treat people of other faiths in the same tolerant way. We would be much more welcomed among them, unlike the present state we are in today, hated

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(1) Al-Albani, *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh,* Hadeeth no. 5931. He said it is "authentic."

(2) Al-Ba'karah: 109.

(3) Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Fikh Al-Sirah,* cit., 1/238, corrected by Al-Albani in the process of editing this book.

(4) Thomas Arnold says: "When the Muslim Army reached the Jordan Valley and (the Muslim commander) Abu 'Ubaydah camped at Fihl, the Christian inhabitants of the country wrote to the Arabs saying: "Muslims, you are closer to our hearts that the Byzantine Romans, though they are of our own religion. You keep better faith with us, are more merciful and compassionate, less oppressive and unfair and better rulers. The Byzantine Romans have forced us to accept their rule, subjugated and robbed us of our property and our homes." Arnold goes on to say: "The people of Emessa (Homs) closed their gates against the army of Heraclius and told the Muslims that they preferred their government and justice to the injustice and oppression of the Greeks and the Romans." *The Call to Islam,* cit., p. 73.

because we ourselves have hated others and been cruel to them, especially to Muslims lately.

Now I'm certain of the truthfulness and validity of everything I've read in the books of fair-minded western writers about the mercy shown by Muhammad and students in his school to the people of other faiths.

Would you give me samples of what they said in this regard, I asked?

Sure, he said. It is only right that the truth is told and spread among people:

-In *Arab Civilization*, the French orientalist Gustav Lebon says: "Despite everything said about him by his adversaries in Europe, Muhammad showed a great deal of tolerance and magnanimity towards all *thimis* (Jews and Christians living in an Islamic state under the protection of Muslims)."(1)

-He also said: "Islam is one of the greatest religions in cultivating minds and souls and promoting justice, benevolence and tolerance."(2)

-Robertson, in *The History of Charlemagne*, said: "The followers of Muhammad alone combined tolerance with the call to their faith."(3)

-In *The Ethics and Customs of Muslims*, the famous German poet and philosopher Goethe said: "There is no doubt that Muhammad was the greatest tolerant in the face of attacks launched both by people of other faiths, and by the early stirrings of atheists' drivel- tolerant in the real and divine sense of the term, which the Prophet well and truly cultivated in the minds and souls of Muslims."(4)

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(1) As quoted in *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Gharb*, cit., p. 57.
(2) Gustav Lebon, *Arab Civilization*, translated into Arabic by A. Zu'aiter, Beirut: Dar I'hya' Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, 21956, p. 126.
(3) As quoted in E. Dremenghem's *The Life of Muhammad*, cit., p. 362.
(4) As quoted by Muhammad 'Uthman, *Muhammad fi Al-A'dab Al-'Alamiah Al-Munsifah*, Damascus: 1996, p. 20.

-In *The Day the Universe Changed*, James Burke said: "The rich, civilized and highly cultured Islamic society was marked by its tolerance to other faiths. Under the rule of Muslim Caliphs thousands of Jews and Christians lived in peace and perfect harmony with Muslims."(1)

-In *The Story of Civilization*, Will Durant said: "The Jewish minorities lived in peace and security with Muslims in Constantinople, Salonika, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, North Africa and Spain under Arab rule."(2)

Incidentally, I am fully aware that tolerance is the very soul of mercy, he added.

16. His Mercy with his Enemies

What other kinds of mercy did Muhammad teach in his school, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to show mercy to their enemies. When Muhammad first declared his Prophetic Call and set about converting his people to Islam, hostilities towards him began to surface. Few of his people believed him at first. The vast majority of the mighty and powerful among them rejected him outright and started to plot against him in person and to torture those who believed in him in the hope of putting them off their new faith. The Prophet and the early Muslims suffered so much that he ordered the believers to emigrate to Ethiopia first, in two successive waves. Subsequently, the Prophet himself emigrated from Makkah to Al-Madina with what is left of his followers to escape religious persecution and the mounting hostility of the polytheist unbelievers."(3)

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(1) J. Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*, London: Macmillan, 1990. Translated into Arabic as *'Indama Taghaira Al-'Alam*, Beirut: 1995, p. 50.

(2) W. Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, New York: MJF Books, 1993, p. 8914.

(3) See the kind of torture the polytheist unbelievers inflicted on the Prophet (pbuh) in various accounts of Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiah.

Enemies of the Prophet (pbuh) increased for no other reason than calling them to worship the One Almighty God. They plotted to kill him, and his supporters took turns in protecting him and ensuring his safety from the numerous traps his enemies set for him. His wife 'A'isha reported that "The Prophet was constantly guarded by the believers till God revealed the Quranic verse: 'The Lord will protect you from (the harm of) mankind.'[(1)] The Prophet then went out to the people and told them: do not guard me anymore; God has offered me His protection."[(2)]

Do you know, Father Stephano, what was the Prophet's response to all the hostilities surrounding him?

What?

After all the torture the unbelievers inflicted on him and on his followers, some of the believers told him: Prophet of God, put your curse on the pagan unbelievers and damn them. 'I was not sent to curse people,' the Prophet said. 'I am Godsend as a mercy to the worlds.'"[(3)]

A "mercy to the worlds," I reiterated.

He would not curse his enemies, Father Stephano said admiringly! That *is* real mercy!

Even more than that, I said.

What?

When the polytheist unbelievers went too far in hurting him and rejecting his faith, the divine inspiration offered Muhammad (pbuh) the option of avenging him and utterly annihilating his enemies. I would rather God Almighty bring forth from their descendants people who worship the One Lord and ascribe no associates to Him."[(4)]

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(1) Al-Ma'ida: 67.
(2) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 2489.
(3) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 3945.
(4) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 2992; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3352.

Such a compassionate man! So forbearing and kind hearted! Father Stephano reiterated his admiration. His mercy transcended his enemies to their progeny!

Yes, I said. Boundless mercy, to them and to their descendants.

He used to always pray for them, I added, saying: "Please God forgive my people. They (simply) do not know."(1)

"Please God forgive my people. They do not know," Father Stephano intoned, serenely reflecting on the words. Such a beautiful expression of the inner makings of a merciful self!

One day before the Hijrah to Al-Madina, the chieftain of the Daws tribe met the Prophet (pbuh) and the Prophet called him to believe in the One God. The man did and went back to his tribe asking them to believe in monotheism. They refused and the man returned to the Prophet and told him: Daws people have disobeyed me, put a curse on them, Prophet of God. The Prophet (pbuh) raised his arms to pray and people thought he would put a curse on Daws. He said: "Pray God! Give guidance to the Daws people and bring them in (to the right path of Islam)."(2)

That's prophethood Father Stephano said! Their chief was mad at them and the Prophet showed them mercy!

The companion of the Prophet Jaber bin Abdullah, I added, reported that "we took part with the Prophet in the Najd Conquest. On the way back we reached a valley with many thorny trees. God's Messenger dismounted and sat in the shade of a tree on which he hung his sword. We too dispersed and sat in the shade of trees napping. The Prophet (pbuh) summoned us and we saw him sitting with a bedoiun. The Prophet said: 'This bedouin took out my sword while I was sleeping and when I

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(1) For a full discussion of the various accounts and interpretations of this Hadeeth, see Ibn Hijr, *Fath Al-Bari,* Hadeeth no. 3218.

(2) *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 5981. "Agreed on" but the Hadeeth "Pray God, guide Tha'keef and bring them in (to the True Path)" was considered "weak" and not highly authentic by Al-Albani in his *Difa' 'an Al-Hadeeth Al-Nabawi wa Al-Sirah*.

woke up I found him above my head with the unsheathed sword in his hand. Who would save you from me now, he said. God, I said. The man sheathed his sword and here he is sitting with me. The Prophet did not punish him."[1]

If this were to happen with a leader of our time, the bedouin would be summarily court marshaled and sentenced to death, if not shot on the spot without trial, Father Stephano said.

When "the leader of the hypocrites," Abdullah bin Ubay bin Saloul, the Prophet's most dangerous enemy in the Arabian Peninsula, died, "His son, Abdullah bin Abdullah, came to the Prophet and asked him to give him his shirt so as to use it as a coffin for his father. The Prophet gave it to him. The man asked the Prophet to conduct the prayer of the dead for his father and Prophet stood up to oblige. Omar bin Al-Khatab got hold of the Prophet by his garment and said: Prophet of God, are you going to pray for him and Almighty God forbade you to? The Prophet said: God gave me the choice when he said: 'Pray or do not pray God to forgive them, not even if you offered seventy prayers asking God to forgive them, God shall not pardon them.'[2] Well, the Prophet said, in that case I shall offer more than seventy prayers. But he was a hypocrite, Omar said! Notwithstanding, the Prophet prayed for him."[3]

A sober and wise kind of mercy that brings peoples' hearts together and clears their souls of bitterness and enmity, Father Stephano said.

Exactly. The mercy the Prophet showed to his enemies often proved beneficial and useful to them. The Prophet's companion

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[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadeeth no. 3824. In *Mishkat Al-Masabeeh*, Hadeeth no. 5305, the account goes as follows: "God I said and the sword fell from the bedouin's hand. The Prophet (pbuh) took it and said: And who would save *you* from me now? The Bedouin said: Be the best of avengers. The Prophet asked: Would you say that God is One and that I am His Prophet? No, the Bedouin said, but I give you my word not to fight you or be on the side of people fighting you. The Prophet let go of him. It is said that when the Bedouin returned to his people he told them: I was with the best of men ever."

[2] Al-Tawbah: 80.

[3] *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 4413.

Abu Hurairah reported that "The Prophet of God (pbuh) sent some horsemen to Najd. They captured a man from the tribe of Banu Hanifa called Thumama bin Athaal, the chief of the Yamama People. They tied him up to one of the pillars of the mosque. The Messenger of God (pbuh) came to (see) him and said: Thumama, what have you to tell me, now? He replied: Muhammad, I have a good opinion of you. If you kill me, you will kill a person who had spilt blood. If you do me a favour, you will do a favour to a grateful person. If you want wealth just ask what you will. The Messenger of God kept him bound to the following day then came to him again and said: What have you to tell me, now, Thumama? He replied: What I have already told you. The Messenger of God kept him to the following day then came to him again and said: What have you to tell me, Thumama? He replied: What I have already told you. The Messenger of God said: Set Thumama free.

Thumama went to a palm grove near the mosque and took a bath. He entered the mosque again and said: I give witness that there is only One God and Muhammad His servant and Messenger. O by God, Muhammad, there was no face on earth more hateful to me than yours, but (now) it has become to me the dearest of all faces. By God, there was no religion more hateful to me than your faith, but (now) it has become to me the dearest of all religions. By God, there was no city more hateful to me than your city, but (now) it has become to me the dearest of all cities. Your horsemen captured me as I intended to go on Al-'Umra journey. Now what do you say? The Messenger of God (pbuh) announced the good tidings to him and told him to go on his way to do 'Umra. When he reached Makkah, somebody asked Thumama: Have you defected and become an apostate? He said: No, I have rather embraced Islam with the Messenger of God (pbuh). And by God, you will not get a single grain of wheat

from Yamama until it is permitted by the Messenger of God (pbuh)."[1]

This also proves to me that Muhammad was not only merciful but a sensible and wise man too.

That's right, and if you want further evidence to validate your judgment let's see the mercy Muhammad showed to his enemies at its best- the day he conquered Makkah. The Prophet of God (pbuh) came face to face with his deadliest enemies, the polytheist unbelievers of the 'Quraish tribe who had inflicted upon him and his followers all kinds of harm and torture I referred to earlier.

That day he did not face them as their equal but as their conqueror, the man who triumphed and finally subjugated his yielding enemies who laid down their arms. The Prophet could well have avenged himself, and in fact some of his closest allies, including Omar Ibn Al-Khatab, were expecting vengeance. They knew the crimes the enemy committed against Muhammad (pbuh) and against the weaker Muslims with him. And surely the Prophet did wreak vengeance on his enemies! Do you know how?

How, he said, full of anticipation?

He avenged himself by simply pardoning all his enemies!

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[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* Hadeeth no. 4024; *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 3310. In *Irwa' Al-Ghaleel,* (5/42) Al-Albani said that "another version adds the following: He (Thumama) went back home and banned all grain export to Makkah. The situation was so hard for Makkans that they wrote to the Prophet (pbuh) begging him by the blood ties between them to ask Thumama to lift the ban and allow food to go through to them, and the Prophet (pbuh) did." Al-Albani said the chain of narrators for this addendum is fairly authentic.

The addendum occurred in *Sirat Ibn Hisham* as well (Ibn Kuthair edition, p. 1121.) in a different phrasing. The Prophet (pbuh) had sent a letter to Thumama bin Athal and Huathah bin Ali Al-'Hanafian, the two masters of the 'Hanifa tribe, calling them to Islam, like he did with all kings and emirs after the Hudaibiah Peace Accords. Both refused (See *Usd Al-Ghabah* 1/72) and the situation between Muslims and the 'Hanifa tribe deteriorated so that it became a virtual state of war till the time Thumama converted to Islam (See *Al-Kamel fi Al-Tareehk* 1/318 and *Al-Mukhtasar fi Akhbar Al-Bashar* 1/5.). Huwatha however remained on his old faith and did not convert to Islam.

He pardoned them! How? And his senior companions expecting vengeance?

I'll tell you about the Conquest of Makkah and how the Prophet (pbuh) taught his students to show mercy to their enemy.

On the condition that it is taken from the primary sources and original texts, he said.

As you wish. Ibn Abbas reported that "The Prophet embarked on the Conquest of Makkah on the tenth of Ramadan with ten thousand Muslims gathered from Muzianah, Sulaim and all other tribes that converted to Islam. Along with the Prophet came the Emigrants and the Ansar, not a single man of them staying behind or dodging the fight.

The Prophet reached a village called Mur Al-Thahran(1) 'Quraish still totally in the dark, having caught no wind of what the Prophet (pbuh) intended to do. That night Abu Suffian, Hakeem bin Hizam and Badeel bin Wark'a'(2) went out sniffing around for news.

Al-Abbas bin Abdul Mu'taleb had already met the Prophet at some stage on the way. Abu Suffian bin Al-Hareth bin Abdul Mu'taleb and Abdullah bin Abi Umayah bin Al-Mughera met the Prophet (pbuh) too between Makkah and Madinah.(3) They asked to see him, and Um Salamah talked to the Prophet (pbuh) on their behalf, saying: Prophet of God, they are your cousin and your cousin and brother in law. I have no need for them, the Prophet (pbuh) said. My cousin disgraced me (in reference to the send-up parody of the Prophet in Abu Suffian's poetry), and my other cousin and brother in law said what he said to me in Makkah (a reference to Abdullah bin Abi Umayah's siding with 'Quraish against the Prophet and accusing of him of all sorts of

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(1) A valley near Makkah with a small village close to it called Mur and known as Mur Al-Thahran. See *Mu'jam Al-Buldan*: Al-Thahran.

(2) Two elders and leaders of the 'Quraish tribe.

(3) Abu Suffian bin Al-Hareth is the Prophet's cousin. Abdullah bin Abi Umayah is his brother in law (brother of the Prophet's wife Um Salamah).

false charges). When they received the answer, Abu Suffian said, and he had his son with him: By God, either he'd give me permission to see him or I'll take this son of mine by the hand and walk the earth till we die of hunger and starvation. When the Prophet (pbuh) was told that he pitied them and admitted them. They entered and announced their conversion to Islam."[1]

'What a morning 'Quraish is about to have,' Al-Abbas said when the Prophet (pbuh) reached Mur Al-Thahran! By God, if the Prophet entered Makkah by force before the Makkans sought to make amends and seek protection, it is the perdition of 'Quraish to the end of time. He said: I rode the Prophet's white mule till I reached the A'rak. Maybe I'll find some woodcutters, milkmen or some needy people around, I said to myself. I could send them over to Makkah to tell the people where Muhammad is camping and ask them to come up to him and solicit his vow of protection and peace before he entered the city by force. As I was riding about seeking what I came out for, by God I heard Abu Suffian and Badeel bin Wark'a retreating. I've never seen so many soldiers and camp fires, Abu Suffian said. By God they are the fires of the tribe Khuza'a' set alight for war, said Badeel. No, by God, Khuza'a' is far too humble and mean to have so many soldiers and camp fires, said Abu Suffian. I recognized his voice. Aba Hanthalah, I called for him. He recognized my voice too. Is it Abu Al-Fadhl, he asked? Yes, I said. I'd give my right arm to know what is going on, he said, pray you tell me. Woe is you, Abu Suffian, I said, this is the Prophet of God (pbuh) and his people. What a morning 'Quraish will have tomorrow! Pray you, tell me, what is to be done, he asked? By God! If the Prophet gets hold of you he'll chop off your head, I said. Come up behind me on this mule and I will take you to the Prophet (pbuh) and ask him to give you his vow of protection and safety. He hopped behind me and his two friends returned. I headed back to the Muslim camp. Every time I passed a Muslim camp fire they'd ask who is this, and when they'd see the Prophet's mule they'd say:

(1) There is another version of Abu Suffian's conversion to Islam cited Al-Albani and edited by Al-Ghazali in *Fi'kh Al-Sirah*. He said it is "fairly authentic."

Ah, the Prophet's uncle on his mule. When we passed the camp fire of Omar bin Al-Khattab, he asked who is this and he came up close to me. He saw Abu Suffian on the back of the mule behind me and said: Abu Suffian?! The enemy of God himself! Thank the Lord He made it possible for us to get hold of you without a vow given or agreement made about your safety. He rushed to the Prophet (pbuh) and so I did. I spurred the mule and went ahead with just about the same distance a slow mule would overtake a slow walker. I jumped off the mule and went in to see the Prophet and so did Omar hot on my heels. Prophet of God, Omar said, this is Abu Suffian in our hands with no vows or agreement to guarantee his safety and protection. Let me chop off his head. *I* gave him my word and vow, Prophet of God, I said. I sat close to the Prophet, held his head in my hands and said: By God, no one else shall keep the Prophet company tonight. When Omar went too far in attacking Abu Suffian, I told him: Hold on, Omar! By God, had he belonged to Bani Udai bin Ka'ab (Omar's sept of 'Quraish), you wouldn't have said all this, but you know he belongs to Abdi Munaf (Al-Abbas's sept). Omar said: Easy, Abbas. By God, the day you declared your conversion to Islam was dearer to me than my own father's had he become a Muslim. What bugs me is that I know it was dearer to the Prophet (pbuh) too. Take him to your quarters, the Prophet (pbuh) said, and bring him to me first thing in the morning. I took Abu Suffian away and he stayed with me that night. I brought him to the Prophet (pbuh) the next morning and when he saw him the Prophet (pbuh) said: Woe is you Abu Suffian! Isn't it time you knew God is One? Abu Suffian said: How generous, tolerant and loving to your kith and kin you are! I'd give my own father and mother for your sake. Had there been another god with God, I'm sure he would have helped me! The Prophet said: Woe is you, Abu Suffian! Isn't it time you knew I am the Godsend Prophet? Abu Suffian said: How generous, tolerant and loving to your kith and kin you are! By God, I had some doubts about that in me still till now (i.e. he no longer has any doubts now). I said: Woe is you, Abu Suffian! Declare God is

One and Muhammad His Prophet before your head is chopped off. He said: Abu Suffian bore witness to the truth and announced his conversion to Islam. Prophet of God, I said, this man values his pride and honour. Give him something to be proud of. Yes, the Prophet said. Whoever enters Abu Suffian's house is safe; whoever stays in his own house and closes his door is safe; whoever enters the Holy Mosque is safe.

When Abu Suffian stood up to go, the Prophet told me: Stop him by the narrow strait of the valley near the mountainside so that he'd see the parade of God's soldiers marching.

I took him along with me and held him where the Prophet of God (pbuh) had ordered me to. The tribes passed us by one after the other, each holding its banners. Who are these people, Abu Suffian would ask every time the soldiers of a tribe passed. They are the Sulaim tribe, I'd say. Forget Sulaim, he'd reply. The next tribe would march and he'd ask: Who are those? Muzainah, I'd say. Oh, forget Muzainah, he'd reply. All the tribes passed one after the other and he kept asking about everyone of them- who are these, I say such and such tribe and he says forget this and that tribe. Then the Prophet of God (pbuh) himself marched with his legion of emigrants and Ansar, their green banners raised high, their shining armour blinding the eyes. Holy God! Abu Suffian said, and who are these, Abbas? This is the Prophet of God marching with the Emigrants and Ansar. By God, Abu Al-Fadhle, he said, no one is up to fighting this lot. No one has the power to face them in battle. The reign and power of your nephew, Abbas, will be huge tomorrow. It is the might and rule of the prohethood, Aba Suffian, I said. Yes, you're right. Well, what now, he asked? I said: Save your people.

He said: Abu Suffian came up to his people and shouted at the top of his voice: People of 'Quraish! Muhammad has come to you with an army way beyond your power to fight. Whoever enters Abu Suffian's house is safe. His wife Hind bint Utbah stood up and held him by his moustache and said: Kill this dark and skinny mean man! Damn such an elder! Woe is you, he said.

Don't let this woman mislead you. This is no time for bragging and phony self pride. I told you he comes to you with an army way beyond your power. Whoever enters Abu Suffian's house is safe. Woe is you, they said, and what good is your house? (It is not big enough for all of us.) He said: And whoever stays in his own house and closes his door is safe; whoever enters the Mosque is safe. The crowd dispersed, each to his house or to the Mosque."[1]

From now on, Father Stephano said, I shall not find it strange to read: "History has never known a more merciful conqueror than the students of the school of Muhammad," as you put it. Whoever teaches such a lesson in his school on the day of the Conquest of Makkah, mercifully turning the day of his enemies' perdition into a day of peace, whereby they are unharmed in the safety of their own homes, is bound to produce conquering students who would inflict nothing but mercy, compassion and nobility on other peoples!

The mercy he showed to his enemies was such that the Prophet (pbuh) sought to avert harshness and cruelty to them in advance.

How, he asked?

Before he'd send the army on any combat mission, the Prophet (pbuh) used to give categorical commands that prohibit the harming of noncombatants in the enemy camp. This was done in strict adherence to God's commandment outlined in the 'Quranic verse: "Fight in the cause of God only those who fight against you, and do not transgress for God loves not the transgressors."[2] Some companions of the Prophet reported that when he appointed a commander of an army or even a brigade, the Prophet used to tell him in private to fear God, show piety

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[1] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 3341. Al-Albani edited this Hadeeth from a number of authentic Hadeeths cited in *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim* and others. In his *Difa' 'an Al-Hadeeth Al-Nabawi,* Al-Albani considered the famous Hadeeth in which the Prophet told the people of Makkah "Go, you are the freed ones" less authentic.

[2] Al-Ba'karah: 190.

and humaneness to all and take good care of the Muslims put under his command. Then the Prophet would say: "Conquer in the name of God and in God's own cause. Fight whoever blasphemes against the Oneness of God. Conquer but do not transgress, do not betray or double-cross, do not mutilate bodies, do not kill a single youth or child (in another version of the Hadeeth: do not kill any child or woman)."[1]

How merciful indeed, Father Stephano said! To tell you the honest truth, had we- westerners- been as merciful with our enemies as Muhammad was, we would have been able to avert so much bloodshed and so many wars that had no justification whatsoever, except perhaps pride, arrogance, cruelty and sheer greed.

European politicians, and the self-serving opportunists around them, have adamantly refused to acknowledge the virtue of Muhammad's mercy to his enemies. Some western scholars of fair and enlightened minds however have given him his due share of credit.

How, I asked?

The French orientalist Emil Dremenghem said: "In his final victory, Muhammad proved to have a kind of inner greatness rarely paralleled in history. He ordered his soldiers to show mercy to children, women, the weak and the elderly. He warned them against demolishing houses, robbing merchants or cutting down trees. He ordered them not to unsheathe their swords except when it is absolutely necessary."[2]

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(1) *Sahih Muslim,* Hadeeth no. 3261. In Al-Baiha'ki's *Al-Sunan Al-Kubra* (9/90), it is reported on the authority of Anas bin Malek that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Don't kill any old man, child, youth or woman."

His students and companions always abided by his commandments. It is reported by Al-Baiha'ki in *Al-Sunan Al-Kubra* (1/90) that Abu Bakre raised an army and sent it to Bilad Al-Sham but before the army left he gave its leader the following rules of engagement: "Do not kill a youth, a woman, an old man, a sick person, a monk or a priest; do not cut off trees; do not demolish buildings; do not slaughter a camel or a cow except to eat; do not burn or destroy palm groves."

(2) *Muhammad fi Nathar Falasifat Al-Ghar* , cit., p. 34.

In the same book, *The Life of Muhammad*, he also said: "As a person, the Prophet of Islam Muhammad was only an illiterate man, almost wholly innocent of any formal education, like all his people at that time. He knew however that God is boundlessly merciful and he endeavoured to transcend human nature and vanquish the vengeful traits in the human psyche."(1)

Len Poole, the western scholar and writer, says: "Many European memoirists and biographers who wrote about Muhammad the Prophet of Islam, tried to assassinate his character and distort the story of his life with all sorts of claims and fabrications they had concocted. They accused Muhammad of cruelty, for instance, which does not in any way stand to the test of historical evidence, much like other charges they had drummed up. Indeed, if we go back and ask history to adjudicate in this matter, we find that the alleged cruelty was never a part of Muhammad's code of ethics and norms of behaviour. This is judging by the way he treated the captives in the Battle of Badre, by the mercy and tolerance he showed to his enemies, by his impressive forbearance in putting up with all the harm those enemies had inflicted on him, by his compassion and kindness to the elderly, the sick and the children, by his ceaseless efforts to prevent bloodshed, by the amnesty he gave to those who spent eighteen years fighting him and showing him all kinds of hatred and hostility, inflicting all kinds of aggression, tyranny and repression on him and on his followers."(2)

Similarly, in his *The People of the Orient and Their Beliefs*, the German orientalist Bartley Saint Heller says: "The Prophet Muhammad advocated monotheism and was most compassionate and merciful in his mission, even with his own enemies. In fact the two personal attributes that loom large in his character are the two most sublime attributes of the human self- justice and mercy."(3)

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(1) Ibid., p. 33.
(2) Ibid., p. 38.
(3) Ibid., p. 45.

17. His Mercy with the Human Mind

I'll round up with a kind of mercy that may not have crossed your mind.

And what is that, Father Stephano asked?

The Prophet (pbuh) taught people in his school to be merciful with their own minds.

And can one be merciful with the mind, let alone his, he wondered!

The mercy that indulges the body is bound to reach the mind, I said.

How?

If you train your mind to accept the truth and nothing but the truth, you do yourself a great service and are being merciful with your own mind. On the other hand, if you train your mind to accept superstition and falsehood, you cultivate a slavish and repressed mentality.

That's right but in what way was Muhammad merciful with the human mind?

The Prophet (pbuh) told people around him only the truth and they in turn got used to accepting nothing but the truth from him. Truth here is the source of factual thinking just as lying is the source of false and superstitious thinking. The Prophet (pbuh) told people, for instance, that he is simply a human being like them, with the exception of the Divine Revelation and the prophethood God had blessed him with. Exactly as the Quranic verse instructs him: "Say I am only a human being like you but with the Divine Revelation that tells me your God is One."[1]

Yes but where is his mercy with the human mind here?

The companion of the Prophet Jaber bin Abdullah said: "The sun was eclipsed the day Ibraheem, the son of the Prophet (pbuh), died. People said it was because of Ibraheem's death (i.e.

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[1] Fu'silat: 6; Al-Kahf: 110.

a miraculous sign of reverence, which was a commonly held superstition in the pre-Islamic era). The Prophet (pbuh) prayed six *rak'at*… then stood and spoke to Muslims: 'People! The sun and the moon, you must understand, are two of God's signs and miracles. They are not eclipsed for the death or the life of anyone. When you see something like that (solar or lunar eclipse), pray till it is cleared."(1)

You are right, he said. Had he not been a true Prophet he could have easily used this piece of superstition which right reason does not accept to enhance or prop up his status amongst them.

His mercy with the mind was also manifest in prohibiting Muslims from practicing some traditional Arab crafts- like birdlore (omens and augury), magic and prophesying (fortune telling)- which degrade the mind below the level of right thinking and perception.(2)

You remind me of Lamartine's poem, "Who Is Greater Than You Muhammad," in which he celebrated the Prophet's shunning all superstitious modes of thinking: "Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or not, a more sublime aim, for this aim was superhuman; to subvert superstitions which had been imposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing."(3)

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(1) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 1508. It is "agreed on" in its different versions cited in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim* and other Hadeeth books.

(2) See Hadeeths related to these issues in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (The Book of Medicine) and their interpretations in *Fath Al-Bari*, where various jurisprudential views are cited.

(3) *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*: 9991, 6/04/06.

18. His Mercy with Animals

Any other kind of mercy left Muhammad did not teach to people in his school, Father Stephano asked?

If you insist to go on, yes, there is yet one further kind of mercy the west frequently brags about these days, perhaps to cover its cruelty in other aspects of human mercy. The Prophet taught this kind in his school some one thousand four hundred years ago.

Which is?

It is not related to mercy to human beings, I said.

To what then, he asked?

Mercy to animals.

Animals, he said, taken aback! We thought that animal rights are the exclusive property of modern western civilization.

You cannot be serious!

I could be, were it not for a simple fact. The west today might well refrain from hurting a cat or killing a dog. Yet it would not hesitate to wipe out entire nations and peoples if it as much as caught the slightest whiff of oil in the lower depths of the earth, as it is doing in Iraq now, or the slightest glimmer of some precious metals within the borders of a particular state, as it did in Africa!

More than that, Father Stephano added. The west is progressively exterminating the native inhabitants of Palestine to rob them of their land and hand it over to complete strangers. It is much like exterminating the native Indians of the American Continent, which is not too far back in history.

You are absolutely right, Father Stephano, I said. How decent of you to tell the truth in the face of a tyrannical ruler.

But how would you explain the extra care and attention the west gives today to animal rights, I added, when you juxtapose it to denying "the other" his inalienable human rights?

The only explanation for the obvious contradiction, he said after a moment's reflection, is that the west, like other inhabitants of this world, has good and bad elements. The bad element it seems has overpowered and totally disarmed the good in the west these days. The animal rights activists can well turn into human rights activists, reinforcing the good element with enough rigour and power as to say to all bad and evil elements: No! Enough is enough!

One thousand four hundred years prior to the establishment of animal rights groups in the west, the Prophet (pbuh) was teaching students in his school how to show mercy to animals, especially the ones that are useful to man, whether for riding, working or eating. He said: "Be pious and obey God's commands even in dealing with these uncomprehending beasts. Ride them the right way and eat them the right way."[1] Put them to good use and treat them well, that is. The "good way" here cannot be but with kindness and mercy.

And how are these animals to be treated in the right way, he asked?

The Prophet taught people to use the riding or working animals the way they were originally created. Some people used to sit or rest on the backs of their riding animals when the animals are crouching or standing. Others used animals to address the crowds, standing on their backs to be seen and heard by others. In either case the animal is not used for the purpose it was created for by nature, practically turning the animal into a chair in the former and a pulpit in the latter. Although they remain complaint, the Prophet (pbuh) could feel that the animals are hurt or are uncomfortable with the unnatural positions and uses they are put to. That is why he said: "Ride these animals without hurting them; keep them safe and indulge them; do not use them as seats."[2] He also said: "Beware of using the backs of your riding animals as pulpits. Almighty God had created them to take

(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 23.
(2)Ibid., Hadeeth no, 21.

you to countries you could not have reached without them except with great difficulty. He made the land for you to utilize, so find in it what you need."[1]

How beautiful are those humane and merciful touches, Father Stephano said! Don't you agree with me that it is perfect mercy with those wonderful creatures that we look after them and give them food and water and refrain from overworking them?

Sure, I said, and the Prophet did not overlook this in his teachings. It is reported that one day he entered an orchard that belongs to one of the Ansar men and found a camel there. When the camel saw the Prophet, it started to whine and nuzzle up to him, its eyes watering as if in complaint. The Prophet stroked the camel and rubbed its ears and it calmed down. "Who owns this camel, the Prophet asked? To whom does this camel belong? It is mine, Prophet of God, an Ansari youth said. Wouldn't you show some piety to God in treating this animal He made you in possession of? The camel complained to me that you starve and overwork it."[2]

So, riding and working animals have been treated kindly and mercifully in the school of Muhammad, Father Stephano said. What about animals used for food?

The most important aspect of mercy shown to this kind of animals, having looked after feeding them and giving them enough water and rest, is to be merciful when we slaughter them.

And how did Muhammad teach mercy to animals when slaughtered, he asked?

It is reported that "the Prophet (pbuh) came across a man putting his foot on the side of a goat's face while he sharpened his knife and the goat looking at him. Couldn't you have done this beforehnd (i.e. sharpened the knife in advance and before

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[1] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 22.

[2] Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 2269. He said it is "authentic." It is also labeled authentic in *Sahih wa Dha'if Sunan Abi Dawood*, no. 2549; in *Riyadh Al-Saliheen*, Hadeeth no. 967; and in *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahiha*, Hadeeth no 20.

you lay the animal for slaughter), the Prophet said? Do you want to kill it (make it feel the pain of death) twice"[1]?!

"God ordained benevolence in everything," the Prophet (pbuh) said. "So if you kill an animal kill it well, and if you slaughter it slaughter it well. Let each of you sharpen his knife and let the slaughtered animal die quickly and comfortably."[2]

Having taught people how to slaughter animals mercifully, he promised them rewards for the application of this kind of mercy killing. A man came to the Prophet once and said: I slaughter my goat mercifully. "And God will be merciful with you if you show mercy to the goat."[3]

He stressed the significance of this kind of mercy and the reward for it. He said: "He who shows mercy even in the slaughtering of a small bird, God will be merciful with him on the Day of Judgment."[4]

What a difference, he said, between this merciful killing Muhammad taught to people in his school and what some westerners do when they club seals to extinction with no mercy or compassion!

Do you know the *Sharia'* law taught in the school of Muhammad for this kind of butchering animals?

What?

They wouldn't be fit for human consumption and Muslims are forbidden to eat them. As stated in the 'Quranic verse: "Forbidden to you (the eating of) carrion, blood, pork, and whatever is offered in sacrifice to any other than God. Also forbidden are the animals killed by strangling, clubbing, headlong falling, head-butting and those devoured by wild beasts. Only

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(1) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 24.
(2) *Sahih Muslim*, Hadeeth no. 3615.
(3) Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah,* Hadeeth no. 26.
(4) Ibid., Hadeeth no. 27.

what is slaughtered in the appropriate way (is allowed for you to eat)."[1] The clubbed here is the animal beaten to death.

If only animal rights groups in the west today would draw people's attention to all these unmerciful acts of killing and slaughtering of animals.

Not only killing, surely, but every other act that smacks of cruelty and lack of mercy to these animals is forbidden in the school of Muhammad (pbuh). It is reported that the Prophet came across a donkey branded in the face and he said: "God curse the man who branded it (there)."[2]

The Prophet noticed that some people used animals as live targets to practice their archery- or any other kind, like javelin throwing- and he strictly banned it because of the cruelty and lack of mercy entailed to the animals. It is reported by Abdullah bin Omar that "The Prophet (pbuh) cursed whoever takes a living soul as a target."[3]

Saeed bin Jaber said: "Omar's son passed by a group of people who set a hen as a practicing target. Who did that, he asked?! The Prophet of God had cursed the one who did it."[4]

If the animals were not created for riding, working or eating, Father Stephano asked, would they be entitled to Muhammad's mercy?

Yes, I said. A companion of the Prophet reported that "We were travelling with the Prophet (pbuh) and he went away for a call of nature. We saw a redstart with its two chicks and we took them away from here. The bird kept hovering above us and flapping its wings. When the Prophet returned, he asked: 'Who bereaved this mother and deprived her of her child? Give it back

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[1] Al-Ma'ida: 3.
[2] Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb,* Hadeeth no. 2293. He said it is "authentic."
[3] Al-Albani, *Sahih wa Dha'if Sunan Al-Nisa'i,* Hadeeths no. 4441-4443. He said they are both "authentic."
[4] Al-Albani edited the Hadeeth in *Ghayat Al-Maram,* electronic copy, Hadeeth no. 382. He said it is "authentic."

to her…. (Later) He saw an ant colony we had set fire to and he said: Who burnt this? We did, we said. No one should torture with fire except the Lord of the fire (God), he said."[(1)]

In showing mercy to animals, the Prophet (pbuh) did not only limit himself to observable reality but used animals as subjects of his proverbial wisdom that impressed on peoples' minds for a long time. He told his companions once, warning against cruelty to animals: "A woman was tormented in Hell for a cat she had kept locked till it died. She neither fed it, gave it water or set the cat free to feed itself of the scrap and vermin of the earth."[(2)]

Another sample of his proverbial wisdom promoting mercy and kindness to animals is reported by Asma' bint Abi Bakre. "God's Messenger (pbuh) said: While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. Coming out, he saw a dog panting and eating mud with its desperate thirst. The man said: This dog is as thirsty as I was. So he went down the well, filled his shoe with water, held it with his teeth then climbed up and gave the water to the dog. God thanked him and absolved his sins. The people asked: Is there a reward for us in serving animals, Prophet of God? Yes, he replied, there is a reward for serving every living creature."[(3)]

The Prophet's proverbial wisdom was by mo means detached from his practice in daily life. His wife 'A'isha reported that "the Prophet used to tilt the jug of water for the cat to drink then performed his ablutions for prayer with what is left of the water."[(4)]

[(1)] See Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeths no. 25 & 487.

[(2)] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 25.

[(3)] Ibid., Hadeeth no. 29. See the same Hadeeth in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, no. 5550 and *Sahih Muslim*, no 4162.

[(4)] Reported by Al-Dar'kutni. Al-Albani cited this Hadeeth in *Irwa' Al-Ghaleel* on the authority of Abi 'Qutadah: "A cat came by and he tilted the jug for it to drink. He said a cat is not impure. It is one of those creatures that go round (visiting) your homes." Hadeeth no. 173. He said it is "authentic."

So, Father Stephano said after a moment's reflection, the British theological scholar Karen Armstrong was right in what she said in her *Muhammad.*

What did she say?

She summed up what she knew about Muhammad's mercy to animals, having exposed the ignorance of the West with his merciful character. She said: "Down the centuries we have envisioned Muhammad as a sullen and surly man, a tough warrior and a cool, calculating politician. But he was an incredibly compassionate and sensitive soul. He loved animals, for instance. When he found a cat sleeping on his gown he let her sleep on and hated to disturb her (it is even reported that he cut his only gown round the bit where the cat was sleeping in order not to wake or disturb it). It is often said that one criterion of social progress lies in a society's attitude to animals. All religions prompt people to love and respect the natural world, and Muhammad tried to teach Muslims to do just that…. He prohibited the branding of animals in a way that hurt them, and he banned all animal fights."(1)

Father Stephano reflected for a while and said: After all you've told me, I'm wondering whether there is a single creature excluded from the mercy of Muhammad and the students of Muhammad's school?!

Conclusion

Now, then, after all I've told you, what would you say to a non-Muslim asking you this question: Was Muhammad merciful?

I'd say Muhammad was not only merciful; Muhammad was mercy incarnate.

Puzzled by the expression, I hastened to ask, as if seeking confirmation of what I heard:

What did you say?

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(1) K. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, cit., p. 344.

I said Muhammad was not only merciful; he was mercy itself embodied in a human form- mercy incarnate. Anything wrong with that?

Not at all, I said. I think you hit the nail on the head. It is actually the exact appellation the Prophet himself used in describing himself. Addressing humanity at large he said: "People! I am a mercy given (to you)."[1]

Yes, he was indeed. Whoever knew Muhammad well would think God Almighty had made him out of pure mercy then offered him as a gift to all humanity.

Father Stephano, I said in conclusion: is there any kind of mercy, other than those I've mentioned, you would wish to explore further?

No, no. I have heard enough to quench the thirst of anyone seeking the truth about aspects of Muhammad's mercy for human and non-human beings. I don't really know how to thank you and repay you in kind.

It is easy, I said. The Prophet (pbuh) had taught us mercy in everything. If somebody did you a favour, it is enough to reward him with a very short sentence, at once nice and easy to say but weighty and expressive.

What is that sentence, he said?

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Whoever was done a favour, let him tell the benefactor: May the Lord reward you. He would have conveyed enough thanks and gratitude."[2]

May the Lord reward you for me, and grant the best of rewards to Muhammad on behalf the whole of humanity for all kinds of mercy he taught in his school.

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[1] Al-Albani, *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah*, Hadeeth no. 490. Books of interpreting Hadeeths cite this in both meanings- "*mihdat*" (derived from *hidayah*, i.e. guidance) and "*muhdat*" (derived from *hadiah*, i.e. gift).

[2] Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb*, Hadeeth no. 969. He said it is "authentic."

The mercy that had adorned the character of Muhammad, mind you, made me love and admire him more. I shall give you a copy of my book after publication and, God willing, you'll find in the dedication something to please you.

May the Lord guide you to the right path and please you with what you rightly deserve.

You've been silent for quite a while, Father Nicholas, I said, turning to my neighbour. Why don't you join in?

I am only a keen listener. Still, he who knows the truth about the Prophet of Muslims cannot fail to love him.

May the Lord guide you to the right path too. May He love you and guide others at your hands to the right path.

It is time for your *suhur* now, he said, looking at his watch. I'm sorry we've kept you up so late.

Not at all, I said. You did me a great favour yourselves. May the Lord reward you both for me.

The two guests stood up ready to go. I saw them to the front door and wished them a very good night. I closed the door quietly then rushed to the kitchen to avail myself of the blessings of *suhur*.*

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* The pr-dawn meal in Ramadan before the beginning of fasting.

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